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New York

President:	Mr. Cohen	(United States of America)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mrs. Cordova Soria
	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Ms. Marlin-Romeo
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey

Agenda

The question concerning Haiti

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (S/2018/795)

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The meeting was called to order at 9.50 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The question concerning Haiti

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (S/2018/795)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Haiti to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Bintou Keita, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/795, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti.

I now give the floor to Ms. Keita.

Ms. Keita (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to express my gratitude to the United States, in its capacity as President of the Security Council, for convening today's meeting on Haiti. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome the presence of the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Haiti.

I am happy to present to the Security Council the second of four reports (S/2018/795) requested by the Security Council during the current mandate of the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH), which ends on 15 April 2019, in accordance with resolution 2410 (2018). I will also provide an update on developments in Haiti since the report was published, on 30 August.

(*spoke in English*)

The report reviews the Mission's work with the Government, the United Nations country team and external partners to prepare, in accordance with resolution 2410 (2028), the transition to a non-peacekeeping United Nations presence in the country beginning no sooner than 15 October 2019. The focus of MINUJUSTH remains centred on mandate implementation, particularly in the priority areas identified by the benchmarked exit strategy, which weaves together a framework of the evolving conditions under which the current United Nations configuration can confidently transform into a non-peacekeeping presence in the country. Following the report of the Secretary-General of June 2018 (S/2018/527), which presented the 11 benchmarks to the Council, this report provides a measure of their implementation through an assessment of 46 distinct indicators. To that end, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Mission have jointly engaged in an exercise to set up a more comprehensive data-collection mechanism and to track the progress of each indicator since the Council took note of the benchmarks three months ago.

The visual infographics that are being distributed to Council members are the result of that exercise. The dashboard, which presents a diverse and representative sample of the main areas covered by the benchmarks, is not meant to replace the comprehensive overview that the benchmarks in their entirety reflect, but rather gives a quick, general overview of the progress made thus far.

The traffic-light matrix included in annex I to the report provides a more comprehensive picture depicting the trend in the realization of each of the 46 indicators. Both visual aids tell the same story — there has been some progress, albeit uneven, in most areas. Nonetheless, several challenges remain and dedicated intervention to spur progress is required for all targets to be achieved by October 2019. Constant efforts must be undertaken, for example, to ensure that the development plan of the Haitian National Police is fully implemented, so that both the professionalism and the number of police officers continue to improve. As the dashboard shows, the rate of officers per 1,000 citizens has slightly dropped, to 1.32, for several reasons, including resignations. Members can see the three elements reflected on the visual aid, with regard to the police. I mentioned the first element as an example.

The indicators are also a useful tool for the Mission and highlight the areas in which more focused strategies and renewed efforts are necessary to address the thornier issues. Many of those will require political, rather than technical, work to make a difference. In that regard, it is important to point out that, in consultation with the Haitian authorities, MINUJUSTH has developed a political strategy that seeks to help build momentum and strengthen political

buy-in from Haitian stakeholders, through a concrete course of action within a clear timeline, in support of efforts by the Haitian authorities to achieve key targets under the benchmarks and in close cooperation with other international partners.

One such critical area on which progress on several benchmarks hinges is the adoption and promulgation of key rule-of-law legislation. While the Mission is engaged in providing support to Parliament to implement a road map towards the adoption of the draft penal code and the draft code of criminal procedure, and is encouraging legislators to finalize and adopt the draft law on legal aid, the drafting of legislation to enhance police work and improve the functioning of the penitentiary administration has yet to commence. I am referring to the first visual aid pertaining to legislation, covered in benchmark 1 and indicator 1.

Similarly, indicators, such as the availability of the national action plan for human rights and human rights obligations, shown on the previous slide, are covered in benchmark 9 and indicator 1. The nomination of the nine members of a Permanent Electoral Council, which is the last visual aid on the dashboard, is covered in benchmark 11 and indicator 1. The representation of women in key State institutions, such as the Court of Cassation and the Superior Council of the Judiciary, have not been achieved. That slide refers to judicial appointments, with three methods to monitor the gender situation, covered in benchmarks 2 (a), 2 (b) and 2 (c). Targets on oversight and accountability bodies are also lagging, especially those pertaining to judicial inspection, covered in benchmark 5 and indicator 1. They are critical to the strengthening of the judiciary, and, once achieved, would ensure a speedier reduction in the length of prolonged pretrial detention, on which progress is so badly needed. It is covered in benchmark 1 and indicator 8.

(*spoke in French*)

With regard to security, while the number of murders fell during the period under review, covered in benchmark 6 and indicator 3, significant threats persist, including an increase in gang-related crimes. Armed gangs in Martissant and other areas south of Port-au-Prince — covered in benchmark 6 and indicator 5 — seeking to expand their illegal operations and areas of influence in order to generate greater resources and position themselves before the next legislative elections, in 2019, remain a challenge for the Haitian National Police. Regrettably, armed gangs are still well known for the pressure they exert on politicians to negotiate access to areas under their control during the election campaign period, and, in many cases, even their attempts to influence elections in their favour.

The successful implementation of the Haitian National Police 2017-2021 development plan, with the support of MINUJUSTH, will enable the Haitian Government to gradually continue to assume its security responsibilities. Although an evaluation of the first year of implementation of the plan, to be presented to donors on 10 September, shows encouraging signs of progress, it also reveals gaps that must be addressed quickly to ensure that progress continues. They include the lack of sustained efforts by national authorities and international partners to provide the necessary financial resources to support the full implementation of the plan. In that regard, the ongoing commitment of the country's leaders and the international community will be essential as the transition progresses.

In close consultation with its national counterparts, MINUJUSTH has developed an integrated security transition plan, as requested by the Council. The plan will guide the first phase of a responsible and effective withdrawal of the United Nations police presence in Haiti, in accordance with resolution 2410 (2018) — from seven to five formed police units (FPUs), between 15 October and 15 April 2019. One unit, with special weapons and tactics capacity, will be transferred to Port-au-Prince, while two formed police units will cease operations by early March 2019 in anticipation of the repatriation of their personnel and equipment by the end of the same month. The regions from which the FPUs will be withdrawn have been selected on the basis of their respective levels of stability, improved security situation, progress made in achieving target indicators and the need to ensure the smooth functioning of MINUJUSTH operations until October 2019. Mitigation measures are being put in place to accompany the withdrawal, in consultation with the Haitian authorities.

Above and beyond clear, well-crafted plans, the situation on the ground must be closely monitored. Today marks exactly two months after the beginning of the violence that broke out on the streets of Haiti amid protests against the abolition of long-standing subsidies for oil products, which has led to an increase of 38 per cent in the price of petrol and diesel and 51 per cent in that of kerosene. Such a flare-up in violence, not seen

in Haiti for several years, highlights the volatility of the current security situation. Since the July unrest, the authorities have not sought to address the root causes of the unstable social conditions, while the process by Parliament to ratify the policy statement of the appointed Prime Minister and the assumption of office by the new Government remain pending. Resentment among the people is fuelled by a steady stream of revelations about the alleged benefits of State officials and the debate surrounding the questionable use of PetroCaribe funds over the past 10 years. The risk of major unrest remains at a heightened level, given the combination of political and socioeconomic triggers without losing sight of the possibility of natural disasters during the current hurricane season.

(*spoke in English*)

Time is of the essence to make concrete progress on MINUJUSTH's mandate implementation through the 11 benchmarks acknowledged by the Council. Together, MINUJUSTH, the country team, the Government of Haiti and other partners will need to redouble efforts to make up for the time lost because of the challenges resulting from the events of 6 to 8 July, given the time-bound nature of the mandate and the transition process. Those are all challenges that must be addressed by a fully functioning Government, the forthcoming establishment of which presents an invaluable opportunity to reset the dynamics among national actors, reinvigorate the national sector-based dialogue and catalyse the devising and adoption of a new governance and stability pact. In that regard, we welcome the announcement by Prime Minister-designate Jean-Henri Céant of the proposed members of his ministerial Cabinet. A new Government and the leadership of the newly appointed Head of MINUJUSTH and Special Representative of the Secretary General for Haiti, Ms. Helen La Lime, who is here with us today, should create renewed momentum in our partnership with Haiti, the strength of which is essential to the achievement of our transition targets. Ms. La Lime, who assumed her functions and began her in-briefing in New York this week, will deploy to Port-au-Prince next week. We hope that the Security Council and the friends of Haiti will continue to provide strong support for their endeavours.

The President: I thank Ms. Keita for her briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

I welcome Her Excellency Ms. Leona Marlin-Romeo, Prime Minister of Sint Maarten.

Ms. Marlin-Romeo (Netherlands): The Kingdom of the Netherlands would like to express its sincere thanks to Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Bintou Keita for her excellent briefing on the situation in Haiti. We are pleased by the attendance of Special Representative Helen La Lime. We warmly welcome her appointment and wish her good luck in executing her duties.

I am particularly pleased to be here today. Sint Maarten, a small island developing State and autonomous country in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, is the proud home to more than 118 distinct nationalities. One of the largest of those is the Haitian diaspora, numbering more than 1,000 persons. With such strong social ties, the events in Haiti are very much felt at home. As part of the Caribbean region, we also share some of Haiti's vulnerabilities to natural disasters and climate change. Today marks the one-year anniversary of Hurricane Irma, the strongest Atlantic hurricane on record. Let me commemorate here the people who passed away or were injured, those who lost their homes and livelihoods and those who today continue to rebuild their lives — not only in Sint Maarten, but also in neighbouring Caribbean countries. Throughout the region, work remains under way to improve resilience and ensure a full recovery from its devastating impact. Our national recovery and resilience plan will include institutional reform and capacity-building.

We are discussing the situation in Haiti today against the background of the benchmarked two-year exit strategy to a non-peacekeeping United Nations presence. For that transition to happen successfully, a further strengthening of the rule of law is paramount. The rule of law is the bedrock of any just, prosperous and peaceful society. It is an element of trust for both the population and investors, and it helps cushion external and internal shocks, which Haiti recurrently undergoes. Sint Maarten, as a Caribbean country in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, recognizes that challenge. Over the past few years, Haiti has made significant progress in difficult circumstances, but, as the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/795) indicates, substantial work remains to be done.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands therefore encourages the Government of Haiti to continue institutional reform, strengthen rule-of-law institutions

and improve respect for human rights. That means increased engagement by the Government with MINUJUSTH in all those areas, but it also means providing the necessary political, legislative and budgetary support. One important dimension in that regard is judicial reform. To that end, the Parliament needs to swiftly adopt both the criminal code and the code of criminal procedure.

The rule of law also requires effective and accountable security institutions, in particular police and correctional facilities. The outbreak of violence in July serves as a reminder that the security situation in Haiti continues to be fragile, and it could be challenged again in the coming months. It is of paramount importance that the Haitian National Police improve its ability to manage such threats and shore up the trust of the Haitian people in its performance. Particular attention should be accorded to the reported increase in gang activities and any perceived vulnerabilities following the scaling down of the presence of formed police units in two areas. We commend Haiti on recent steps taken in cooperation with MINUJUSTH to increase the capacity of its national police. In that regard, I would also like to highlight two very positive developments: the increasing number of women recruited and the specialized office for sexual violence crime, which has been embedded within the judicial police directorate. With regard to sexual-based violence we welcome the initiatives undertaken to increase awareness, although the noted underreporting remains worrisome. It is essential that perpetrators of those serious crimes are prosecuted.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands welcomes the thorough report of the Secretary General, which transparently measures the level of progress made with regard to the Mission's mandate against the previously elaborated benchmarks. We also appreciate the capacity assessment, security transition plan and mitigating measures that MINUJUSTH has drafted and identified. All that should ensure a robust framework for the transition to a non-peacekeeping United Nations presence, thereby leading to a responsible withdrawal based on the situation on the ground. The Government of Haiti, the Mission and the United Nations country team should continue to work closely together towards achieving that. The coming period will be crucial in that regard. We wholeheartedly support the Secretary-General's urgent call to redouble efforts to ensure attaining the benchmarks.

As a close neighbour to Haiti, Sint Maarten and the Kingdom of the Netherlands strongly support Haitian aspirations to achieving peace, justice and development. The necessary foundations for that are clear — a strengthening of the rule of law, including by increasing the police, justice and corrections capacity, a swift implementation of priority actions and increased respect for human rights. To that end, the Government of Haiti should take full advantage of the presence of MINUJUSTH until its exit, and of the United Nations country team thereafter. The Kingdom of Netherlands will continue to support the United Nations-committed work in Haiti.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I thank Ms. Bintou Keita, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for her enlightening briefing.

The United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH) is doing excellent work by providing support to the Haitian authorities in a country where the security, economic, social and environmental contexts remain fragile. The protests that took place in July, which prompted the Security Council to request the parties to restore calm, have sorely tested the Haitian National Police and proved the importance of pursuing and stepping up efforts to achieve lasting stability in Haiti, in particular by building the capacity of the Haitian National Police, together with MINUJUSTH. That awareness and, in particular, its translation into action are even more important as we move towards transition through an exit strategy that will begin on the ground with the withdrawal of two police units by 15 April next year.

In that context, I would like to underscore three points that are critical to consolidating the rule of law, without which there will be no lasting stability.

First, with regard to the Haitian National Police — one of the pillars of stability — we welcome the strengthening of the national police force, which now has more than 15,000 officers. In a volatile security context, marked by the presence of criminal gangs in several regions of the country, it is those officers who are helping to build the rule of law on the ground. France welcomes the support provided by MINUJUSTH in that area, in situations that are at times dangerous, and calls on the Haitian authorities to take full responsibility for managing public disturbances ahead of the Mission's departure. In order to ensure the long-term effectiveness

and resilience of law enforcement, France urges the Haitian authorities to avoid politicizing the National Police. As seen in the past, politicization would be incompatible with the lasting stability for which we and the Haitians are striving. It is essential to put in place recruitment procedures based on professional merit, neutrality and impartiality that meet rule-of-law criteria.

Secondly, concerning justice, without which there can be no political legitimacy, it is now up to Haiti to pursue, in line with its national plan, all avenues for improving the judicial system established by MINUJUSTH, including issues related to the efficiency of the criminal justice system and detention conditions in prisons. It is therefore crucial to build the trust of the Haitians in the capacity and willingness of the judicial system to fight crime. At times it is said that this goal can wait, on the grounds that priority should be given to economic development. Nothing could be further from the truth. Equitable and sustainable development depends essentially on building the rule of law under which all economic actors can enjoy the legal certainty that encourages them to invest — that is, to build the future of their nation. Furthermore, there can be no economic development without resolute action to fight corruption. France therefore encourages the Haitian authorities to continue their efforts in that direction and to do their utmost to bring those responsible to justice and eradicate the problem.

Lastly, in connection with the issue of justice I just addressed, it is essential to pursue efforts in the area of respect for human rights in order to assure Haitians of respect for their fundamental rights. That is a prerequisite for the stability of Haiti and the well-being of the Haitian people. France calls for continued efforts to strengthen the Office of the Ombudsperson for Human Rights and to consolidate the implementation of the 2014 strategic plan, in particular by appointing a high-level focal point in the Government. France also calls on Haiti to reduce the number of detainees held in pretrial detention for more than two years, improve detention conditions and launch fully independent investigations into human rights violations committed by law enforcement. It is also essential that transitional justice mechanisms be put in place to shed light on massive human rights violations committed in the past. With regard to that and other issues, France expects the Haitian authorities to redouble their efforts ahead of the transition period and the drawdown of MINUJUSTH.

The United Nations has taken action, as expected by the international community, in particular after the tragic earthquake in 2010. As we approach a new phase in the relationship between Haiti and the United Nations, France strongly encourages the Haitian authorities to make the most of MINUJUSTH — now headed by Ms. La Lime, whom I wish every success in her work — in order to lay the foundation for a successful transition.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I would like to welcome Her Excellency Ms. Leona Marlin-Romeo, Prime Minister of Sint Maarten. I wish her a pleasant stay in New York.

Through you, Mr. President, allow me to extend our sincerest thanks to the delegation of the United States for having included this item on the agenda for the month of September. We thank Ms. Bintou Keita, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for her detailed and informative briefing, as well as for her important role and achievements in Haiti. My delegation welcomes the appointment on 1 August of Ms. Helen Meagher La Lime as the new Special Representative for Haiti and Head of the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH). We trust that her academic background and experience will greatly assist her in her duties.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea is closely following developments in Haiti and notes the ongoing efforts of its Government, the United Nations and partners to address the country's challenges and best promote the sustainable development of Haitian society as a whole. We are deeply concerned about the events of early July — the street protests in Port-au-Prince and other areas of the country as a result of an increase in fuel prices. We deplore the fact that those protests led to loss of life and caused considerable collateral damage. The peaceful manifestation of dissent by citizens must respect the laws of the country so that those involved do not harm those who do not support them. In that regard, we welcome President Jovenel Moïse's praiseworthy position and his initiative to eliminate subsidies on oil products, as well as his subsequent appeal to citizens to remain calm and return to their homes.

The delegation of Equatorial Guinea commends the visit in May by members of the Economic and Social Council Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti, who had the opportunity to meet with President Moïse, other political actors and representatives of civil society and

development agencies operating in the country. They discussed socioeconomic issues, development priorities and the rule of law, inter alia. We are confident that such meetings will serve to promote the sustainable development that the Haitian people need.

We note the valuable work of the legislature, as evidenced by its adoption of key bills, such as that of access for persons with disabilities to buildings and facilities; the establishment of a fund for persons with disabilities; as well as the creation, organization and functioning of the National Council on Legal Aid, among others. We believe that the vision to better integrate persons with disabilities demonstrates that the political will exists to extend the development of Haiti to all social strata. Similarly, we welcome the support of UNICEF for the construction of a juvenile court, which will open before the end of the year. We believe that it is a good justice initiative that will strengthen the rule of law.

We commend the United Nations for its enhanced efforts to eradicate cholera in Haiti. There has been a steady decline in the number of cholera cases since the end of 2016, and that trend should continue for the rest of the year.

I wish to conclude by expressing my support for, and gratitude to, the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti for its efforts. I call on all State institutions in Haiti — the Government, Parliament, the courts, the national police and civil society — to collaborate closely with President Jovenel Moïse and to support him in his reform agenda with a view to promoting the sustainable development of Haiti, which absolutely requires upholding the law, respect for human rights, good governance, respect for State authority and the strengthening of Haiti's legal institutions.

Mr. Tumysh (Kazakhstan): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Bintou Keita for her objective and comprehensive briefing and for her valuable contribution to today's deliberations. We also commend her able team for its effective work. We welcome the Prime Minister of Sint Maarten and the Permanent Representative of Haiti to the Chamber.

Back in April, the Security Council voted to extend the mandate of the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH) for one year (see S/PV.8226). We would like to take this opportunity to commend the Mission's work in launching a number of important projects and initiatives, inter alia, supporting the rule of law, contributing to the continuing development of the Haitian National Police and protecting human rights.

Kazakhstan commends the efforts undertaken by President Moïse and his Government to promote stability, security, economic development and social changes in the country. The Haitian Government's reiterated call for the need to more closely align international development assistance with those national priorities is commendable.

At the same time, while recognizing the significant progress achieved in improving the political and security environment, some key issues have yet to be addressed in a number of priority areas, such as fighting against cholera, the severe overcrowding of prisons, enacting anti-corruption measures and ensuring financial and economic stability, food security and the stabilization of the humanitarian situation.

We fully support the Secretary-General's observation in his latest report (S/2018/795) that the violent events of July underscored the importance of building broad-based political support to implement key economic reforms, which are basic prerequisites for the long-term stability of Haiti.

Against that background, the joint efforts of the international community to achieve progress will be essential to consolidating the stability gains and establishing a strong foundation for long-term political stability, security and development. Kazakhstan encourages the Government to foster greater cooperation with regional organizations, particularly the Caribbean Community and the Organization of American States, with a view to identifying and leveraging new opportunities for partnership.

As the United Nations system prepares for a smooth and effective transition towards sustainable development, we also call for the different United Nations entities on the ground and the Headquarters to continue working as One United Nations through a more integrated and coordinated approach.

In conclusion, we strongly believe that the Government, the Mission, the United Nations country team and all international and regional partners must continue to work together to plan for the transition and beyond. It will be essential to anticipate, address and mitigate all challenges that may emerge from

the transition to a non-peacekeeping United Nations presence in Haiti.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We appreciate the convening of this meeting and the comprehensive and illuminating briefing of Ms. Bintou Keita. We would like to welcome the appointment of Ms. Helen Meagher La Lime as the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Haiti and Head of the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti and wish her every success. We also welcome the Prime Minister of Sint Maarten.

Three months ago, we adopted resolution 2410 (2018), which extends the Mission's mandate until April 2019 and lays the groundwork for ensuring the transition to a post-peacekeeping presence by the United Nations system in the country. To that end, we wish to stress the importance of the goals and the 46 indicators proposed by the Secretary-General to monitor the progress and effectiveness of the transition promoted by the Mission, the Government of Haiti and the United Nations country team.

However, we believe that much remains to be done to achieve an effective an transition. The violent demonstrations in July and the subsequent resignation of Prime Minister Lafontant, as noted by Ms. Keita, reflect the volatility of the situation and the precariousness of the balance required for the political, economic and social consolidation of the country.

We welcome the appointment of Mr. Jean Henry Céant as the new Prime Minister. We look forward to his prompt ratification by Parliament and the formation of a new Government. We also stress the need for Parliament to speed up the process of adopting the criminal code and the criminal procedural code, as well as the urgency of constituting the Permanent Electoral Council.

In the area of security, on the one hand, we are concerned about the increase in gang-related violence and violent protests; on the other, we highlight the important programmes to reduce communal violence, and in particular the work of mobile teams and the implementation of quick-impact projects.

We also stress the importance of the Mission's support for the national police. However, we are concerned about reports of human rights violations by law enforcement agencies and the lack of investigations, which favours impunity and limits access to justice. We hope that the completion of the first annual evaluation of the strategic development plan of the national police, carried out with the assistance of the Mission, will make it possible to improve capacities to defend and promote human rights.

In the justice sector, we are concerned about the persistence of prolonged pretrial detentions and prison overcrowding. We therefore appreciate the growing number of legal cases and the Mission's assistance with the penitentiary system. We also welcome the appointment of the Ministry of Justice as the new focal point for human rights, and we hope that it will soon be formalized. We also look forward to the speedy ratification of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which has been pending since its signature in 2013.

We consider it essential to remedy the problems of overlapping functions with the Ministry of Justice and to speed up the appointment of judges in order to ensure the efficient functioning of the justice system. We believe that the draft strategic plan of the Superior Council of the Judiciary should serve those objectives.

Additionally, we would like to highlight the renovation of the headquarters of the unit to combat sexual crimes, thanks to Norway's cooperation, as well as the increase in the number of investigations. To that end, we emphasize that due attention to victims and access to justice require psychological and medical assistance.

Those are some of the areas in which the Government of Haiti needs to redouble its efforts in order to achieve the goals set within the framework of the Mission's exit strategy.

I conclude by reiterating my country's commitment and support for the efforts of the Haitian people and the Government to build sustainable peace.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks the Secretary-General for his report (S/2018/795) on the discharge of the mandate of the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH), pursuant to the relevant recommendations set out resolution 2410 (2018). We thank Ms. Bintou Keita, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for her detailed briefing on recent developments in Haiti and the activities of MINUJUSTH during the period under review.

Côte d'Ivoire is very concerned about developments in Haiti, characterized by the recent social protests that led to the loss of human life and significant material damage. My country condemns those unfortunate events, which undermine the rebuilding process and exacerbate the living conditions of the Haitian population, which aspires to peace, stability and development. In the light of the Secretary-General's report, my delegation will focus on three issues — the sociopolitical situation, the economic situation and the exit strategy.

On the political front, the situation in Haiti remains worrisome due to the persistence of socio-political tensions. Côte d'Ivoire therefore calls on all stakeholders to act with restraint and respect the rule of law. It also urges them to engage in an inclusive political dialogue to address the major challenges facing the country. In that regard, it welcomes the good offices of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in providing consensual responses to the social challenges raised by the rising price of oil.

My delegation also welcomes the appointment of Mr. Jean Henry Céant as Prime Minister in early August. It looks forward to the approval of his appointment by Parliament, as well as the formation of a Government whose mission will be to lead Haiti towards the consolidation of peace and stability.

My delegation believes that the achievement of these objectives should take into account the following aspects: the strengthening of cooperation between the executive branch and Parliament; the fight against corruption; reform of the texts governing political parties; the need for the Government, the various political parties and members of civil society to overcome their political differences; the adoption of a governance or stability pact, which should result from the national sector-based dialogue and encourage all relevant actors and institutions to support the implementation of agreed political, economic and social objectives.

My country also calls on the international community to support all efforts to promote dialogue in Haiti in order to create conditions favourable to the holding of peaceful, credible and transparent parliamentary and local elections in October 2019. Côte d'Ivoire urges the Haitian authorities to fulfil their obligations with a view to guaranteeing the success of the electoral process.

With regard to the difficult economic situation in Haiti, my delegation urges the Haitian authorities to take appropriate measures to create a climate of trust between the population and national institutions and to reassure investors in order to mobilize the financing necessary to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. To that end, the Government of Haiti should adopt legislative reforms and implement programmes and projects that address the immediate and long-term needs of the population.

Finally, under the post-crisis strategy, my delegation welcomes the commitment of MINUJUSTH, the United Nations country team and all other partners working with the people and Government of Haiti to build peace, stability and development of Haiti. My delegation MINUJUSTH welcomes, in that regard, the actions successfully carried out by the Government of Haiti with the support of MINUJUSTH, including the mitigation measures taken to accompany the withdrawal of the United Nations Mission, prevent a security vacuum and ensure a smooth transition in the departments concerned with the strengthening of the capacities of the Haitian National Police, as well as the intensification of the community violence reduction programme; the finalization of the security transition plan in anticipation of the withdrawal of MINUJUSTH, taking into account the risks and national capacities to respond adequately to security needs; the development of the joint resource mobilization strategy to support the implementation of strategic priorities, taking into account the requirements of transition planning.

My delegation also welcomes the results achieved with respect to respect for the rule of law and the promotion of gender and human rights, including the improvement of the detention conditions of the prison population.

The success of the MINUJUSTH exit strategy will inevitably involve close cooperation and the harmonization of priorities among the various stakeholders to build and consolidate Haitian public institutions. My delegation therefore calls on the Government of Haiti to collaborate fully with the United Nations so as to ensure the success of the previously identified priority tasks in order to achieve a smooth and efficient transition without a United Nations peacekeeping presence.

In that regard, my country urges the Haitian authorities to take all measures necessary to meet the

persistent challenges, including the capacity building of the Haitian National Police and the pursuit of reform in all rule-of-law sectors, including human rights and criminal justice reforms. It also encourages the Haitian authorities to take steps to implement the principle of accountability for the perpetrators of proven violations of human rights.

In conclusion, my delegation congratulates all United Nations staff who work tirelessly to strengthen peace and development of Haiti. We wish Ms. Helen Meagher La Lime, the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Haiti and Head of MINUJUSTH, every success in her new duties.

Mrs. Cordova Soria (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Ms. Bintou Keita, for her briefing on the latest events in the Republic of Haiti and on the activities of the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH). We also welcome the Prime Minister of Saint Maarten.

We regret the events that occurred during the month of July, which confirm the importance of and the obvious link that exists between economic development and stability, and highlight the failure of structural adjustment prescriptions that do not take into account local realities or the effect they can have on the population, in particular on the poorest sector — which, instead of benefiting from such measures, is stripped of what it has — and that undermine the economic, political and social stability of the country .

We believe that, in light of these facts, it is of the utmost importance that Haiti work in pursuit of political consensus with a view to promoting its economic development. In that understanding, we reaffirm our commitment to that brotherly country and call on the international community to continue working to meet the remaining challenges, mainly with respect to the security sector and the rule of law. Such support must be made in consultation and close coordination with the Government of Haiti, in strict respect for its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

We also commend the positive progress in the aforementioned areas and welcome the appointment of Jean Henry Céant as Prime Minister of the Republic of Haiti. We underscore the renewed commitment of the Government to consult with all sectors in order to form a new and inclusive Government, focused on fighting poverty and developing agriculture, energy and infrastructure. To that end, there must be greater alignment of external cooperation with Government priorities, keeping in mind the scope of the Sustainable Development Goals and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Likewise, it is important to strengthen the State's capacities to face natural disasters, with respect to which we commend such humanitarian actors as UNICEF, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination Team for their coordinated assistance in this area. We call on the international community and donors to provide financial support to consolidate the humanitarian response plan.

We appreciate the progress made in the struggle against cholera through the new approach of the Secretary-General. The United Nations and its Members have a collective responsibility to ensure its full implementation. In that understanding, we call on the international community to work and to fulfil its commitments, as well as to provide cooperation to the Republic of Haiti in the construction of sound sanitation and health systems. Cholera remains a critical problem that affects not only sanitation and access to water, but also all areas of development and stability in Haiti that remain priorities for Haitians, as highlighted during the Security Council's visit in June 2017.

Regarding the progress towards the benchmarks and their results, we reiterate that these must be worked out in strict compliance with the MINUJUSTH mandate in the areas of rule of law and security, in accordance with resolution 2350 (2017).

We commend the work of the Mission regarding its community violence reduction programme, involving women and young people at risk in activities that provide them with the tools and capacities to generate income and encourage the community to engage in dialogue. We encourage the Mission to pursue this work, which has proved to be useful in the reduction of crime, complements the interventions of the Haitian National Police, and promotes community dialogue and confidence in the work of the Haitian police and institutions of the rule of law.

We welcome the support provided to governmental institutions in the areas of justice, human rights and security, and we commend the Mission's work on sexual exploitation and exploitation. We encourage

MINUJUSTH to maintain these efforts under the principle of zero tolerance for those responsible for such crimes, who, if found guilty, should be punished accordingly. We reiterate our concern about the issue of children without paternity as a result of sexual abuse perpetrated by MINUSTAH personnel, and we note that the Mission has undertaken a project that aims to cover tuition and lunch for children of victims of those abuses.

We emphasize that there can be no development without peace and no peace without development. In that regard, we believe that the international community must pool efforts and increase synergies with the Government, when necessary and within the framework of the MINUJUSTH mandate, to achieve the main objective, which is to sustainably maintain peace, in accordance with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In conclusion, we welcome the appointment of Ms. Helen Meagher La Lime as Special Representative for Haiti and Head of the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti. We wish her success in her functions, and we are confident that she will perform them impartially, within the framework of her mandate. We reiterate our call to the Secretariat to take geographical representation into account when making appointments to the organization's senior management.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Bintou Keita for both her briefing and the handout on benchmarks; it is particularly useful. We talk a lot about benchmarks in the Security Council when it comes to peacekeeping missions, but we do not always analyse performance against those benchmarks as clearly as she has done here. I therefore thank her very much for that.

Like other speakers today, we continue to appreciate the support that the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH) has offered to the Government of Haiti in its efforts to strengthen the rule of law and further develop the Haitian National Police. We also welcome the progress that the Mission has made as it works towards its two-year exit strategy, and in particular we welcome the joint transition planning with the Government, the United Nations country team and external partners.

I endorse all the points that have already been made today by the representatives of France and the Netherlands when it comes to strengthening the police, improving justice and increasing respect for human rights. I would also echo the points made just now by the representative of Bolivia about the importance of tackling sexual violence in Haiti, including sexual exploitation and abuse. But let me just make three additional points.

First, it is very clear that the political and security situation in Haiti remains extremely fragile, as evidenced by the recent events in July, and the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/795) points to an increase in gang-related violence and raises human rights concerns linked to the police. We would therefore encourage the Secretary-General, his Special Representative and MINUJUSTH to closely monitor such risks to security and stability over the coming 12 months, in close cooperation with the Haitian Government, to avoid backsliding into conflict. With regard to the governance or stability pact that the report mentions, we strongly encourage the Haitian Government to advance the sector-based dialogue that the report has addressed to support the identification of priority steps to agree on the pact as an urgent priority.

Secondly, regarding the benchmarks and the MINUJUSTH transition, as I said, we welcome the detailed assessment of progress in the report, but we share the concerns that progress against the benchmarks has been uneven. I was particularly struck by the details on the benchmark about the number of police officers per one thousand citizens. When the Security Council visited last June, I remember there was a particular focus on increasing the number of police officers, and at that point there was some optimism that the number would go on increasing. Given the centrality of that particular indicator, it is very concerning that, over a year since the Council's visit, the performance on that indicator is actually worse. We now have just over 12 months before MINUJUSTH is expected to leave Haiti, which leaves little time to make sure that the transition is a success. As we have said before, Haitian ownership and delivery of those critical reforms is essential if the transition is to be successful. We therefore believe that it is vital that all parties, and especially the Haitian authorities, intensify their efforts to ensure that those benchmarks are met.

Thirdly, and finally, we urge the Secretary-General to be realistic and clear about the division of responsibilities across the United Nations system and to support the United Nations to fill the gaps identified in the capacity and capabilities of the United Nations

country team, which will be key to a successful transition. On issues such as the development of draft legislation, which will clearly require longer-term support beyond the MINUJUSTH mandate, we wonder if it may be worth considering whether it already makes sense to transition that work to the United Nations country team. We note that the forthcoming United Nations strategic assessment mission, due in February, will be critical to facilitating the timely planning and implementation of the transition, and we look forward to the report of that assessment mission.

Mr. Zhang Dianbin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China thanks you, Mr. President, for convening today's meeting. China also thanks Assistant Secretary-General Keita for her briefing.

China has taken note of the recent violent events in parts of Haiti, which reflect the existing fragile security situation to a large degree and the need for political stability and economic development to be further consolidated. China hopes that the parties in Haiti will promptly resolve their differences through inclusive political dialogue and consultations. The Haitian Government should continue to increase its efforts to develop the economy, improve people's livelihoods and fully implement the Haitian National Police strategic plan to create favourable conditions for the thorough improvement of the situation in the country. The international community and countries of the region should also pay more attention to the issue of Haiti and support its consolidation of peace and stability and its efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

China appreciates the recent work of the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH) and Deputy Special Representative Diallo. We welcome the appointment by Secretary-General Guterres of Ms. Meagher La Lime as the Special Representative for Haiti and Head of the Mission. We hope that Ms. Meagher La Lime will start to work as soon as possible after taking over to help the Haitian Government strengthen its police force and take up in earnest the responsibility of maintaining national security and stability. China is willing to work with other members of the Security Council to contribute to the early achievement of lasting peace and sustainable development in Haiti.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): Let me thank Assistant Secretary-General Bintou Keita for her very useful and informative briefing on the activities of the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH). We welcome the appointment of Ms. Helen Meagher La Lime as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of MINUJUSTH. We wish her and the Mission every success in their efforts to assist the Government of Haiti in strengthening the rule of law, reinforcing the Haitian National Police capacities and engaging in human rights monitoring.

We agree that the violent events that took place early July in Port-au-Prince and other Haitian cities reflect the ongoing volatility of the situation in Haiti and the need to ease the daily hardships faced by the Haitian people. Poland strongly encourages all parties to abstain from the use of violence to achieve political goals, to respect the rule of law and to find a consensual solution to the problems the country is facing. It is extremely important to build broad political support to implement key economic reforms, which are basic prerequisites for the long-term stability of Haiti.

Poland welcomes the appointment by President Moïse of Mr. Jean Henry Céant as the new Prime Minister. We look forward to the formation of a new Government that will continue to lead Haiti towards the consolidation of peace and stability. It is worth emphasizing that the Government of Haiti has taken steps to reform the criminal code and the code of criminal procedure, fight corruption in the civil service and strengthen the justice sector. The improvement of the capacity of the Haitian National Police is also remarkable. Those efforts may lead to major political stabilization and respect for the principles of the rule of law.

We welcome the contribution of MINUJUSTH to improving public security by building the capacities of the Haitian National Police in a wide range of police work and providing equipment and operational support. We are also pleased to note the role of MINUJUSTH in the improvement of the Haitian justice system.

When considering the situation in Haiti, it is essential not to forget that the conditions of the precarious political situation and the fragile economy often lead to the creation of an environment in which guarantees of human rights may turn out to be ineffective and where fundamental rights may be exposed to the risk of abuse and violation.

As underlined in the recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/795), much remains to be done to ensure

a smooth and effective transition to a non-peacekeeping presence in Haiti in the coming year. Haitian institutions still need the support of the international community. We should not limit the United Nations presence in Haiti excessively or too early, bearing in mind the fragility of the situation and the vastness of the work to be done by the Haitian authorities. We need to assure Haitian society that the Security Council will work closely to find the best way to build long-term stability and to strengthen the rule of law in the country.

Poland welcomes the benchmarked exit strategy and transition to a non-peacekeeping United Nations presence in Haiti. MINUJUSTH is a crucial actor in that process, helping the Government of Haiti to meet those benchmarks by providing technical expertise and financial assistance.

Mr. Orrenius Skau (Sweden): I would like to start by thanking the Secretary-General for his report (S/2018/795) and Assistant Secretary-General Keita for her informative briefing this morning. Let me echo colleagues in their appreciation for the way in which she presented progress made in her charts this morning as well.

Sweden commends Haiti for the progress made in its consolidation of democracy and stability. At the same time, the events of the past few months have also shown that the situation remains volatile. There is a strong need for broad-based political support for key reforms.

The mandate of the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH) is well aligned with the priorities set out by President Moïse, including the rule of law and respect for human rights, as well as improving economic development, infrastructure, resilience and security. We hope that the new Government will strive with renewed energy to achieve progress on those priorities, and we hope to see results soon, such as the adoption of a new criminal code and a new code of criminal procedure.

The benchmarks presented in the Secretary-General's report will help those efforts by linking progress made in core areas of the Mission's mandate with other key aspects for stability in the country. Those include socioeconomic development and fighting corruption. The Mission is one of the first to make a transition from traditional peacekeeping in an era of sustaining peace. A continuously successful transition would therefore be important not only to Haiti, but also to the wider United Nations system in demonstrating its capacity to support countries emerging from internal strife.

We welcome the appointment of Helen Meagher La Lime as the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Haiti at this key juncture of the transition phase. Securing a smooth and effective transition will be one of the main tasks in the coming months, and we give the Special Representative of the Secretary-General our full support.

It is important that the Mission continue to pay close attention to gender aspects in its policies and strategic development. Supporting women's participation in political processes is particularly important, as are measures to improve women's security and protection against sexual and gender-based violence. The Mission needs to maintain a strategic focus and clear gender-budgeting. Ensuring that there is adequate information-gathering, monitoring and reporting, and coordination on those matters, is also key. In that regard, let me thank Ms. Bintou Keita for the gender-disaggregated data and the comprehensive gender analysis of the benchmarks that she presented to us in her briefing today.

Given the lack of progress in some of those areas, we are worried about the report's conclusion that the capacities of the Mission and the United Nations country team to work on gender issues are limited. As more and more tasks are given to the country team, the international community must step up to ensure that the team has the resources to take them on.

Much has been achieved by the Haitian people in recent years. Now it is important to keep up the momentum for reform. Longer-term stability and sustainable development require the continued commitment of all parties. Sweden will remain a committed partner for Haiti as the country makes further progress towards the consolidation of peace, democracy and the rule of law.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Ms. Bintou Keita, for her valuable briefing on the situation in Haiti and the role of the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH). I would also like to thank Ms. Susan D. Page, former Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of MINUJUSTH, for her efforts in leading the Mission in

Haiti. We wish the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. La Lime, all the best in her new tasks. I also welcome the presence and participation of Ms. Leona Marlin-Romeo, Prime Minister of Sint Maarten, in this meeting.

I would like to focus on three main aspects: the political, security and humanitarian situations.

First, with regard to the political situation, we followed the latest address of His Excellency President Moïse in the aftermath of a wave of violent protests in many parts of Haiti after the elimination of all Government subsidies on fuel. The address ushered in a number of political reforms and initiatives that helped to reduce tensions, including accepting the resignation of the national Government and calling for national consultations with all active political parties in Haiti to form a new Government and to combat all forms of corruption. The President also focused on advancing the national economy by adopting a number of reforms related to rationalizing Government spending and promoting public investment without prejudice to the basic needs of Haitians.

I would like also to commend the efforts of Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General Diallo and his good offices, in cooperation with the diplomatic corps in Haiti, in order to support the rule of law and stability in the country. We also welcome the appointment of the new Prime Minister, Jean Henry Céant, and we hope that he will enjoy the confidence of the Parliament. We look forward to the adoption of necessary measures to implement the required priorities and reforms in all fields.

Secondly, with regard to the security situation, given its important impact on all other aspects in Haiti, we welcome the significant improvement and the decrease in documented crime rates. However, we call on the national authorities to take full advantage of the expertise of MINUJUSTH in that respect in order to develop and increase the efficiency of the Haitian National Police and to maintain the progress achieved in security and stability while strengthening State judicial institutions, ending impunity and preventing corruption in accordance with the timeline stipulated in the exit strategy of MINUJUSTH. In that regard, we look forward to the strategic assessment to be submitted next March.

Thirdly, pertaining to the humanitarian situation, there is no doubt that despite recent developments, the situation in Haiti remains fragile. There is a need for increased cooperation between the people, the national Government, civil society organizations and the private sector, on the one hand, and the United Nations and donors, on the other, which would help Haiti to successfully survive this critical and very important stage in its modern history. With hard work, there is still time, despite a potentially difficult start, to achieve political stability and sustainable development by adopting short-term plans to meet the needs of the people along with critical mid- and long-term plans.

I would like to highlight a number of elements that should be taken into consideration to improve the humanitarian situation in the country, including, first, implementing the United Nations approach to cholera, which has helped to considerably reduce the rate of transmission; secondly, assisting national institutions in building capacity to prepare for the hurricane season; thirdly, accelerating the implementation of reforms in the national judicial system; fourthly, addressing overcrowding in prisons; and fifthly, engaging Haitians in human rights awareness-raising programmes organized by MINUJUSTH.

In conclusion, I would like to commend MINUJUSTH on its efforts to build on the gains that have been achieved in Haiti in the past few years and to promote security, stability, and long-term sustainable development by supporting the work of the Government in the area of the rule of law.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Assistant Secretary-General Ms. Bintou Keita for her briefing on the situation in Haiti and on the work of the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti. We are also grateful for the very useful and enlightening presentation on the achievements of the Mission.

We must acknowledge the objectivity of the alarming assessments in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/795) that the already fragile security situation has recently been undergoing new trials, notably the mass protests being staged around the country. Regrettably, the political life of the country has been marked by disagreement between the legislative and executive branches, the resignation of the Prime Minister and the Government and setbacks in the work of Parliament, all of which have considerably undermined the prospects for post-conflict peacebuilding in Haiti. We have to note that the humanitarian situation remains

dire. More than 1 million people are in urgent need of food assistance but fewer than half of them are actually receiving it. And to that can be added the fact that the humanitarian response plan is only 10 per cent financed.

These events in no way help the Mission in preparing to withdraw from the country. We have also seen that the gradual transfer to the Haitian National Police of responsibility for maintaining law and order is in difficulties and is going on at a time when criminal groups are increasingly active. These are all problems that the Government and people of Haiti will have to solve on their own in the near future as they assume their national responsibility.

We welcome the efforts of the country's leadership to ensure stability and develop a system of State governance that relies on their own strengths. It will be crucial to ensure that the work of the legislative, executive and judicial branches of Government are well coordinated. And much remains to be done on the part of United Nations personnel, whose task is to provide maximum assistance in the process. For our part, we support Port-au-Prince and affirm that Russia will continue to ensure that the ultimate outcome of the Security Council's work will be a genuine normalization of the situation in Haiti, along with stronger sovereignty and self-sufficiency.

We would once again like to draw the Council's attention to a very important point that for reasons that are unclear has been left out of our discussion. Once again, in spite of the fact that a significant portion of the Secretary-General's report is dedicated to the subject of combating sex crimes and assisting their victims, it contains no information about similar crimes committed by representatives of non-governmental organizations accredited by the United Nations. I would like to remind the Council that we drew attention to the issue in our statements on 3 and 9 April (see S/PV.8220 and S/PV.8225). In the context of the stated United Nations policy of zero tolerance for such terrible crimes, we have no right to ignore flagrant examples.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): We thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2018/795) pursuant to resolution 2410 (2018). We are also grateful to Assistant Secretary-General Keita for her briefing on the most recent developments in Haiti and on the activities of the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH), based on the report.

We note that we meet against the backdrop of the violent events that happened in July and that reflect the serious socioeconomic difficulties that Haiti continues to face. We agree with the Secretary-General about the need to find a consensus solution to some of those challenges within the framework of the existing constitutional dispensation. It is important to ensure that the Government of Haiti continues to make progress towards adopting a governance pact to support the implementation of agreed political, economic and social objectives in order to enhance the confidence of the Haitian people in their institutions. We believe that strengthening the rule of law and democratic institutions, ensuring political stability and improving socioeconomic conditions are the key elements needed for Haiti's greater security, stability and future prosperity. The recent events in Port-au-Prince and other Haitian cities underscore the importance of attaining them. We welcome President Moïse's appointment of a new Prime Minister and we look forward to the formation of a Government that will continue to lead Haiti towards the consolidation of peace, stability and sustainable economic development.

Ethiopia recognizes the important contribution of MINUJUSTH, as well as the wider international community, in support of ongoing efforts to promote dialogue, advocate respect for the rule of law and foster stability in the country through enhanced communication and dialogue at all levels. There is no doubt that much remains to be done to ensure a smooth and effective transition to a non-peacekeeping presence in Haiti in the coming year in accordance with MINUJUSTH's mandate. We therefore concur with the Secretary-General's assessment regarding the redoubling of efforts to ensure progress against the benchmarks that will inform the future drawdown of MINUJUSTH. We welcome the appointment of Ms. Helen Meagher La Lime as the new Special Representative and Head of MINUSUSTH. She will have the important responsibility of overseeing progress while working closely with Haitian stakeholders and the United Nations country team. We wish her every success and commend all of the Mission staff for their dedicated efforts in carrying out their mandated tasks.

In conclusion, I reaffirm our commitment to and solidarity with the brotherly people and Government of Haiti as they continue striving to consolidate the progress made in recent years, and our confidence in the

Haitian people's determination to persist and succeed in their quest for stability, democracy and prosperity.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United States.

I thank Assistant Secretary-General Keita for her briefing and the very helpful graphics that she circulated today. We warmly welcome Helen La Lime and wish her every success with her new mission. We look forward to continued progress from the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH), together with its road map towards the planned drawdown of operations by October 2019.

This past July represented a critical test for both the Government of Haiti and MINUJUSTH, with both the Haitian National Police (HNP) and the United Nations formed police units confronting violent protests and riots. During a time of political instability, the Haitian National Police, with the support MINUJUSTH, acted to protect the civilian population and refrained from actions that would have further inflamed the situation. Those efforts prevented a prison break from the national penitentiary, which would have made an extremely volatile situation in downtown Port-au-Prince even more complex. The continued professionalization of the Haitian National Police demonstrates the progress made towards achieving the Mission's exit strategy benchmarks, and will make possible the on-schedule transition of tasks and responsibilities to the Government of Haiti, in coordination with the United Nations country team. However, it is essential to protect those hard-won gains, and MINUJUSTH has an important role to play before drawing down.

First, more progress must be made in the fight against corruption. No one should be above the law, and we call on the Government of Haiti to work with MINUJUSTH and international partners to strengthen its justice-sector institutions, including its anti-corruption bodies, and to promote judicial reforms to combat impunity and strengthen the rule of law. Secondly, it is imperative that corrupt officials or any other individuals implicated in human rights violations be held accountable for their actions. Thirdly, we must also caution against the politicization of the police. The Government of Haiti must prioritize the continued development and professionalization of its National Police and ensure that the institution remains apolitical. Finally, the Government of Haiti and its civil society and international partners must continue to address human rights concerns, such as those involving sexual exploitation and abuse, violence against women and girls, high rates of prolonged pretrial detention and trafficking in persons.

While there is much to accomplish, we acknowledge the HNP's steps to improve its response to public demonstrations and reinforce its inspectorate general to investigate reported police abuses, as well as progress made in advancing human rights activities through the Haitian Government's Directorate of Civil Protection. The United States looks forward to the scheduled transition to a non-peacekeeping United Nations presence in Haiti by October 2019 and the assumption of those responsibilities by the Government of Haiti.

I will now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Haiti.

Mr. Regis (Haiti) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Sir, for having invited the delegation of the Republic of Haiti to have its views and comments heard before the Security Council with regard to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/795) of 30 August on the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH). I welcome the presence of Ms. Leona Marlin-Romeo, Prime Minister of Sint Maarten among us, and am grateful for her statement. I would also like to especially thank Assistant Secretary-General Bintou Keita for her excellent presentation of the Secretary-General's report.

My delegation notes with the utmost interest the Secretary-General's observations concerning results, progress, trends and salient facts in the political, economic, social and humanitarian areas during the reporting period in the light of the set goals and established benchmarks. The evolving political situation in Haiti over the past three months, especially with regard to the fears of destabilization caused by the unrest of 6 to 8 July following the announcement of an increase in gas prices, has rightly become a centre of attention. Those events, which reflected an irrefutable expression of public frustration in the face of real socioeconomic difficulties, were certainly a major test for the country.

However, the political stability of the country, which had been won through such hard work, was not called into question — nor were the democratic gains or the many achievements of recent years. No one can

deny that the country was rigorously put to the test, but the crisis was overcome. The nation recovered quickly. The institutions of the Republic demonstrated their maturity. State authority is today restored, and public order is being maintained. In that regard, my delegation welcomes the support of the international community, and in particular that of the Security Council as expressed in its press statement on Haiti of 12 July (SC/13419).

In the wake of the July events, the President of the Republic, His Excellency Mr. Jovenel Moïse, fully aware of the challenges of the situation, spared no effort to restore peace to the restive neighbourhoods and peace of mind. Accordingly, following an extensive and painstaking process of national consultations, he appointed a new Prime Minister from among the opposition — Mr. Jean Henry Céant. The latter has been entrusted with forming a national unity Government enjoying the full confidence of Parliament and the legitimacy necessary to confront the urgent economic problems facing the country and pursue the reforms needed for strengthening the rule of law, consolidating democratic gains and achieving long-term institutional and political stability. The next Government will be tasked, inter alia, with organizing the next parliamentary elections, to be held in October 2019, and scaling up the fight against corruption, while vigorously pursuing the structural reforms essential to reviving sustainable growth and development.

In that regard, the Secretary-General's call on all actors in the national political arena to work together for the common good was welcomed with special interest by the Haitian authorities, as was his call for the adoption of short-term measures to meet the immediate needs of the Haitian people and alleviate the difficult situation that they are facing. My delegation hopes that that appeal will also find the broadest possible response from all international community partners, while seeking, in that regard, greater awareness of the extreme vulnerability of the population in the context of official development assistance, in particular opportunities providing essential support for implementing structural adjustment programmes.

Extreme poverty, as we well know, carries with it the inherent risk of creating instability, as the Security Council has repeatedly emphasized. A coherent and integrated strategy for sustaining peace is predicated upon an understanding of the close link between the three pillars of security, development and human rights. In that regard, my delegation believes that immediately improving the living conditions of the most disadvantaged segments of society is one of the most pressing challenges facing the country today. The Head of State has made it a top priority, as it is an essential and unavoidable condition for maintaining a stable political environment, as the report judiciously notes.

With regard to the Secretary-General's review of results and progress in the light of the objectives and benchmarks that have been set, I would like to make a brief comment. My delegation is aware of the delays in a number of targets, but the most important thing to remember is that, despite the enormous difficulties encountered, despite the July crisis and despite the limited resources available, sustained efforts are recorded daily in most targeted areas, be it in the strengthening of the rule of law, the justice system and the National Police, or in the protection and promotion of human rights.

Many indicators bear witness to these efforts and ongoing measures. Let me cite a few on a purely indicative basis: the appointment of the Civil Protector and the strengthening of the capacities of the Office for the Protection of Human Rights; the stability of the security environment; the significant decrease in the level of violent crime; a decrease of about 25 per cent in cases of mob rule; the increased efficiency of the judicial system; the ongoing adoption by the legislature of a new criminal code and a new code of criminal procedure; the improvement of the penitentiary system and conditions of detention; the steady increase in the proportion of women in the police force, where the 10 per cent threshold is about to be reached; the intensification of the fight against corruption, as illustrated by the referral of the PetroCaribe case to the Superior Court of Audits and Administrative Disputes for the necessary follow-up; and the launch of the sector-based estates general of the nation, with the prospect of adopting a pact for stability and economic and social progress.

Much certainly remains to be done, as the Secretary-General has pointed out, to bridge the gaps and catch up with the delays, but the consolidation of the rule of law and stability is on track. That is the essential thing. This is, as we all know, a long-term process. Whatever happens, the public authorities intend to make every effort to achieve the hoped-for results and targets, in particular the continued strengthening of the justice system and police forces, the substantial improvement of the penitentiary system, and the

promotion and permanent defence of human rights. The Haitian authorities are firmly committed to ensuring that everything will be done to prepare in the coming months for a smooth transition from MINUJUSTH to a United Nations presence that is more focused on peacekeeping.

In appointing the new Haitian Prime Minister, the President of the Republic reiterated his determination to implement, together with the Government, the structural reforms necessary to enabling the country to cope with recurrent crises, such as that from which it is emerging, and to meet the complex challenges that it still faces in terms of development. The shock wave unleashed by the events of July — regardless of their magnitude and the public perception of political volatility that they generated — must not obscure one fact that my delegation considers to be essential, namely, the irreversibility of the democratic gains of the Haitian people and their very real and sustained progress towards the consolidation of the rule of law. The President of the Republic and the new Haitian Prime Minister are in agreement with all sectors and actors of the nation that these achievements must be entrenched.

At this crucial turning point in national life, the Haitian people and Government hope to be able to count on the solidarity of the international community, and in particular on the support of the United Nations system, for the establishment of a new cooperation pact that is better adapted to the real needs of Haiti, within the framework of a genuine strategy for the perpetuation of peace, which, in order to be viable, necessarily entails the speedy improvement of the living conditions of the poorest strata, vigorous and sustained growth, the economic and social modernization of the country, and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, including the Goal of eradicating poverty by 2030.

In conclusion, I offer my warmest congratulations to the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Haiti, Ms. Helen Meagher La Lime, who was appointed on 1 August. I convey my best wishes for success to her and her mandate in Haiti.

The meeting rose at 11.30 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.8343

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8343rd meeting

Thursday, 6 September 2018, 11.40 a.m.

New York

President:	Mrs. Haley	(United States of America)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mrs. Cordova Soria
	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce

Agenda

Letter dated 13 March 2018 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/218)

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The meeting was called to order at 11.40 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

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The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I want to thank you, Madam President, for scheduling this meeting today at short notice following the announcements in the United Kingdom yesterday.

When the Security Council last met on this issue, on 18 April (see S/PV.8237), I undertook to update the Council in the light of significant developments. My Prime Minister's full statement to Parliament was circulated to the Security Council as document S/2018/814. As the British Prime Minister announced yesterday in Parliament, the United Kingdom has reached a significant conclusion in the Salisbury chemical weapons investigation. I will come to that later, but first I will provide a brief summary of what happened in Salisbury earlier this year.

On Sunday, 4 March, Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia were found unconscious on a bench in the city centre after being poisoned by a Novichok nerve agent. Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey, a Wiltshire police officer, was also seriously ill after having been exposed to a nerve agent. Following that attack, the United Kingdom notified the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and invited it to confirm the identity of the substance involved, while we briefed members of the Security Council. The OPCW's independent expert laboratories confirmed the United Kingdom's identification of the Novichok nerve agent.

Thankfully, the Skripals are recovering. But, on 30 June, 44 year-old mother of three, Dawn Sturgess, fell ill in the nearby town of Amesbury after being exposed to Novichok. Sadly, she died on 8 July. Her partner, Charlie Rowley was also exposed to the nerve agent and became seriously ill. Police have identified that Sturgess and Rowley came into contact with a counterfeit perfume bottle that had been discarded in Salisbury. Tests of that bottle after its recovery by police confirmed it contained a significant amount of highly lethal Novichok nerve agent.

On 4 September, the OPCW's independent expert laboratories again confirmed the United Kingdom's identification of the Novichok nerve agent with a very high level of purity. I remind Council members that the very high level of purity means that it will have been made by a State.

The inquiry into the Amesbury incident has now been formally linked by the police with the attempted murder of the Skripals. Independent experts of the OPCW have confirmed the identifications as Novichok nerve agents, and it is the exact same chemical that was used in both attacks.

It stretches credulity that the identification of such a nerve agent twice in close proximity could be a coincidence. We have previously shared with the Council the information about the Russian foliant programme from the 2000s, but to recap briefly, there was development of Novichok outside the Chemical Weapons Convention, and Russian agents were trained in assassination techniques, including the use of such agents on door handles.

In the United Kingdom, the police are independent of Government, and they have been conducting a painstaking forensic investigation. That investigation has involved approximately 250 detectives, who have trawled through more than 11,000 hours of closed-circuit television (CCTV) footage and have taken more than 1,400 statements. Working around the clock, they have carried out painstaking and methodical work to ascertain exactly which individuals were responsible and the methods they used to carry out the attack.

That evidence has been independently reviewed by the Crown Prosecution Service, and it has concluded there is a sufficient basis to bring charges. We have thus independently concluded that there is enough evidence to bring charges against two Russian nationals for the following crimes: conspiracy to murder Sergei Skripal; attempted murder of Sergei and Yulia Skripal and Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey; use and possession of Novichok; and causing grievous bodily harm with intent to Yulia Skripal and Nick Bailey. The investigation into the murder of Dawn Sturgess remains ongoing.

The evidence reveals the following. It shows the arrival of two individuals travelling under the names of Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshirov to the United Kingdom from Russia. CCTV and other evidence records their travel to and from Salisbury and, crucially, there are images that clearly places them in the vicinity of the Skripal's house at 11:58 a.m. on Sunday, 4 March. That was moments before the attack took place, which involved placing the substance on the Skripal's front door handle. Should any Council member wish, we can share copies of those images. Furthermore, testing of the hotel where the pair stayed in London revealed the presence of traces of the Novichok substance in their hotel room.

Based on a thorough analysis of our intelligence, the United Kingdom Government has concluded that the two individuals named by the police investigation are in fact officers from the Russian Military Intelligence Service, also known as the GRU. That is a body of the Russian State.

When we briefed the Council before, we attributed responsibility to Russia on the basis of technical means, operational experience — and I recall the case of Litvinenko here — and motive. Russian statements have said that former Russian agents are, if you like, fair game for assassination. Those arguments have now been firmly reinforced by the clear evidence of the involvement of identified Russian nationals travelling to the United Kingdom from Moscow and returning there on Russian passports. That evidence has been sufficient for our independent prosecuting authorities to bring criminal charges in relation to the Salisbury attack and to issue European arrest warrants.

Those two individuals are no longer in the United Kingdom. Were they with us, those two suspects, within United Kingdom jurisdiction, would be liable to arrest on a clear basis in law for their attempted murder crimes. It is clear that the Russian State does not permit the extradition of Russian nationals, and I understand that is a prohibition in the Russian Constitution. Therefore, with respect to those two individuals, we have obtained a European arrest warrant and we will shortly issue an INTERPOL Red Notice. Should either of those individuals ever gain travel outside Russia, we will take every step open to us to detain them, extradite them and bring them to face justice in the United Kingdom.

We responded at the time to Russian behaviour robustly. The Council will recall that we were joined by 28 partners and NATO in expelling more than 150 Russian intelligence officers. That was a proportionate and direct response to deter and degrade Russia's ability to conduct further operations in future and to reduce its ability to use the GRU network to cause our citizens harm.

We have clear evidence of Russian State involvement in what happened in Salisbury and the use of chemical warfare — reckless involvement endangering the lives of many citizens, and reckless involvement engangering the universal prohibition on the use of chemical weapons.

As the Council has discussed before, there is an established pattern of maligned Russian behaviour perpetrated by military and intelligence agencies overseas, examples of which are the October 2016 coup attempt in Montenegro, the June 2017 NotPetya cyberattack, which caused an estimated $1.2 billion in damage worldwide, and other cyberattacks. The GRU has time and again been responsible for Russian interference in other countries' affairs, and most recently we saw a United States indictments of GRU individuals in relation to the 2016 Democratic National Committee hack. Now, in the light of the evidence from Salisbury, we see that GRU activity also encompasses the use of an illegal military-grade nerve agent on European soil.

The five permanent members of the Security Council (P-5) bear a particular responsibility to uphold global norms and international law, and all the more so where weapons of mass destruction are concerned. One P-5 member has not upheld those important norms. One P-5 member has but undertaken a pattern of behaviour that showed that it tried to murder the Skripals, played dice with the lives of the people of Salisbury and work in a parallel universe where the normal rules of international affairs are inverted.

That is a direct challenge to the rules-based international system, which has kept all of us safe, including Russia, since 1945. In the face of such behaviour, the international community needs to continue to defend the laws, norms and institutions that safeguard our citizens against chemical weapons and safeguard them against the threat of hostile foreign interference. That is why the British Prime Minister yesterday set out the importance of using transparent multilateral mechanisms to identify and hold malign actors to account. Allow me to summarize

the steps that we believe should now be taken by the international community.

We need to work together to strengthen the Chemical Weapons Convention against the use of chemical weapons around the world, which we saw most recently violated on the streets of the United Kingdom. We need to build further the capability of the OPCW to attribute the use of chemical weapons. There can be no place for such incidents as Salisbury again. We need to shine a light on the use of State agencies to undermine the rule of law and interfere in the domestic lives of other countries' citizens. And we need to make the best use of our established methods, including sanctions, in curbing threats to our societies and our ways of life.

As Theresa May emphasized yesterday, the United Kingdom has no quarrel with the Russian people. We continue to hold out hope that we will once again enjoy a strong partnership with the Government of that great nation. We fought alongside Russian troops in the Second World War. But we will respond robustly when our security is threatened, the lives of our citizens are endangered and the norms and rules of international law and the international system are flouted in such a brazen and reckless manner.

We stand with our partners and allies. We are determined to continue to disrupt together the hostile activities of foreign intelligence networks on our territories. We will uphold the prohibition of chemical weapons. We will protect our citizens. And we will defend ourselves from all forms of maligned State activity directed against us and our societies.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We appreciate the convening of this meeting and the information that the representative of the United Kingdom shared with us on the investigations conducted and evidence found, of which we take careful note.

We would like to reiterate our deep concern about the use of a nerve agent in public spaces in the United Kingdom, which claimed the life of an innocent woman and seriously endangered the lives of at least four other people. We express our condolences and solidarity with the victims and with the people of the United Kingdom that were potentially exposed to the chemical agent in question.

Peru resolutely condemns all use of chemical weapons. We consider that such a practice constitutes in and of itself constitutes a threat to international peace and security, an atrocity crime and a flagrant violation of the respective non-proliferation regime.

We therefore reiterate our call on the parties concerned to cooperate fully with the investigations and anything else related to this delicate matter, especially through the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and other competent bodies, in line with the principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes. We stress the urgent need to determine responsibility and the corresponding sanctions, within the framework of the rule of law and due process.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the United States presidency for convening this meeting. I also thank the United Kingdom for this very timely update on the results of the British investigation into the exposure of three individuals to a military nerve agent in Salisbury last March. At the outset, on behalf of France, I would like to reiterate the solidarity expressed by our most senior officials to our British friends in the aftermath of the hostile act on 4 March.

The British police investigation has now come to an end. I would like to commend the United Kingdom's commitment to transparency and the way in which it has conducted the investigation in conjunction with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), whose exemplary work I also commend. I will say a few words about what happened, before briefly turning to the more general issues.

The facts are clear: the results of the British investigation, combined with those of the OPCW, confirm the initial analysis, which we agree with, on the absence of any plausible explanation other than that Russia is responsible. Everything lines up. A powerful chemical agent, Novichok, which is considered to be produced by the military, was indeed used in Salisbury against Sergei Skripal and his daughter, and later in Amesbury. I note the British conclusion that such an operation could have been launched and approved only at a sufficiently high level of the Russian State. We have taken note of the issuance by the British justice system of arrest warrants against the two Russian military intelligence officers identified by the British police, and we are prepared to cooperate with its services.

In the light of those very serious elements, I wish to express my country's deep concern and reiterate our condemnation of such acts, which are unacceptable. We have unanimously reaffirmed that position to our partners in NATO and the European Union.

Those actions endanger the safety of many civilians, undermine the safety of one of our closest allies, are contrary to the rules of international law and flout all the principles of mutual cooperation and respect to which we are committed.

The use of chemical weapons should in no way be considered an option at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The re-emergence of those weapons challenges our collective security system in a way that we cannot accept. It is the Council's responsibility to protect the chemical non-proliferation regime, and with it our collective security system. We ask Russia, a member of the Security Council, to respond to all the questions that are raised. We also call on the Council and all our partners, including Russia, to firmly commit themselves to protecting the Chemical Weapons Convention and to reaffirming the prohibition on the use of chemical weapons.

To that end, we must strengthen the capacity of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to ensure that it is able to fulfil its mandate. The implementation of the decision adopted by the Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, held in June following the major incidents in Duma and Salisbury, must serve as our road map. That meeting of the States Parties to the Convention also showed that the majority of the international community shares our concerns about the risk with regard to the chemical non-proliferation regime being called into question and supports the principle of strengthening the Convention's means of protection.

It is essential to provide the international community with an investigation and accountability mechanism for all cases of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Such an instrument is essential for the protection of the chemical non-proliferation regime, and we have long encouraged Russia to take that path. We will return to that topic this afternoon during our meeting on Syria.

As the President of the Republic, Mr. Emmanuel Macron, recently recalled, France is resolutely engaged with and committed to the protection of the Chemical Weapons Convention regime, and it is fully determined. We have just reaffirmed that, together with our British, American, German and Canadian partners.

In the same spirit, we want the European Union to adopt a sanctions regime against individuals and entities involved in the proliferation or use of chemical weapons. The Council can count on France's full and complete commitment in that regard.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I thank you, Madam President, for convening this meeting. I would also like to thank Ambassador Karen Pierce for the detailed update on the investigation into the attempted murder of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury, which involved a nerve agent. We greatly appreciate the transparency of the United Kingdom in this process. We continue to express our full solidarity with the British people and the British Government, as well as our readiness to support our close ally and European partner in taking actions to respond to the shared threat posed by chemical weapons.

Since the beginning, we have condemned that unprecedented attack, which is the first of its kind in Europe after the Second World War. We call on Russia to fully cooperate with the British Government and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

The British investigation concluded that the evidence available is sufficient to state that individuals related to the Russian State are responsible for the attack in Salisbury. Poland has full confidence in the professionalism of the British police and investigating authorities. We believe that the actions taken by the United Kingdom constitute a significant step forward towards ensuring that the use of chemical weapons will not go unanswered.

Let me also reiterate that Poland continues to commend the OPCW and its experts who participated in the technical assistance visit for their outstanding work to determine the facts on the ground in a professional and impartial manner.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): We listened carefully to the important and detailed briefing by the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom, Ambassador Karen Pierce, with regard to the latest results of the investigations into the Salisbury incident on 4 March. Those investigations recently identified the potential perpetrators.

I would like to commend the comprehensive and professional manner in which the investigations to identify the perpetrators of that heinous crime were carried out. I reiterate our confidence in all the actions and measures taken by the United Kingdom as part of the investigations into that incident.

In that regard, we underscore our principled position in condemning the use of chemical weapons — by any party, at any time and wherever it may occur — as a grave violation of international law. We stress the need to hold those responsible for such use accountable, whether they be individuals, entities, groups or Governments. We also condemn the production, acquisition, stockpiling, possession or direct and indirect transfer of such weapons, pursuant to Article I of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which the State of Kuwait joined in 1997.

We express our confidence in the professionalism, independence and transparency of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. We underscore the need to build up its capacity and potential in order to carry out its tasks and shoulder its responsibilities. That would strengthen the non-proliferation regime in the area of investigating the use of such weapons and identifying those responsible for violating it.

In conclusion, we stress the need to uphold international law and norms and to maintain international peace and security, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. We urge all the parties concerned to cooperate with all the investigations under way with regard to this incident.

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands): The Kingdom of the Netherlands welcomes the update provided by the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom on the investigation into the chemical-weapon attack that took place in Salisbury and the subsequent poisoning in Amesbury last month.

I will make three points. First, the Kingdom of the Netherlands condemns the use of chemical weapons and stands in solidarity with the United Kingdom. Secondly, issuing criminal charges is a significant new development that supports and strengthens our earlier conclusions. Thirdly, the Russian Federation should cooperate to establish the full truth and ensure accountability.

First of all, I would like to repeat, clearly and unequivocally, that the Kingdom of the Netherlands condemns the use of chemical weapons anytime, anywhere and under any circumstances. Let me reiterate our full support for the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the important work it does for us. As the United Kingdom is faced with the reckless use of chemical weapons on its own soil, the Netherlands stands in firm solidarity with our neighbour, ally and friend.

Secondly, during previous meetings, the Kingdom of the Netherlands expressed its shock about the reckless attack with a military grade nerve agent on British soil, which exposed innocent civilians to great risks. Since then, we learned that the attack resulted in even more victims, one of whom, Ms. Dawn Sturgess, did not survive. We express our sincere condolences to her loved ones. Issuing criminal charges is an important step that brings us closer to establishing the full truth so that justice can be served. The Kingdom of the Netherlands has full confidence in the investigation carried out by the British authorities and in the fairness and impartiality of the British justice system.

Thirdly, now that the perpetrators of this horrendous act have been identified, they must be brought to justice. Therefore, we call on all States to cooperate to ensure that the two suspects have their day in court in the United Kingdom and to bring the full truth to light about how the attack was carried out. Those who bear responsibility must be held to account. I would like to recall that, on 22 March, the European Council condemned in the strongest possible terms the attack in Salisbury. European leaders unanimously agreed with the assessment of the British Government about the responsibility of the Russian Federation. That assessment has now been confirmed by the criminal investigation, which has led to criminal charges filed against two Russian individuals.

During our previous meeting, on 18 April (see S/PV.8237), the Kingdom of the Netherlands urged the Russian Federation to change its course from denial to cooperation. We reiterate our call for the Russian authorities to provide the United Kingdom with all information to unanswered questions and to cooperate with efforts to bring those responsible to justice.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation would like to thank the United Kingdom for its initiative to convene today's meeting on the letter dated 13 March 2018 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations, on behalf of Prime Minister Teresa May, addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/218), following the poisoning of Mr. Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Yulia, in Salisbury on 4 March.

Côte d'Ivoire would like to reiterate its strong condemnation of the poisoning, which was carried out with nerve agent, and the use of chemical weapons, regardless of the perpetrators, whether in times of peace or of war. The investigations conducted by the British police have zeroed in on two individuals who have alleged links to a Russian military intelligence agency.

The Skripal incident reminds us all about the importance of the strict implementation of the relevant provisions of the international non-proliferation architecture. There is no doubt that strict respect for international law in the area of the combating the proliferation of chemical weapons will enable us to prevent such acts, which constitute a threat to international peace and security. My country calls upon all stakeholders to show restraint and work with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, in line with the competencies entrusted to it during its special session held on 26 and 27 June in The Hague, in order to identify those who use chemical weapons and bring them to justice before the competent international judicial bodies.

The Skripal incident is a source of discord in the Security Council. In that context, Côte d'Ivoire remains committed to the values of dialogue, peace and friendship among peoples and calls upon Member States to preserve the unity of the Council, without which our efforts to meet our goal to maintain international peace and security would be in vain.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): We thank the United Kingdom for its timely update.

We note the significance of the new information from the British investigation; we underline our confidence in the British findings. We call on Russia to change course, cooperate with the ongoing investigation and prosecution and fully disclose any nerve agent programmes to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The most recent information provides further evidence that it is highly likely that Russia was responsible for the attack, as previously stated by the European Council.

We regret that, since the Council last discussed these developments (see S/PV.8237), a British national in Amesbury tragically died following contact with a substance that the OPCW confirmed to be the same Novichok nerve agent that poisoned Sergei and Yulia Skripal. We reiterate our strong condemnation of the use of a nerve agent on British soil and express our full solidarity with the United Kingdom, our close friend and European Union partner.

Once again here in the Chamber, we condemn in the strongest terms all use of chemical weapons, strictly prohibited under international law. It is a common responsibility to ensure that the chemical-weapons ban be respected. It can be argued that permanent members of the Security Council have special responsibilities when it comes to curbing weapons of mass destruction. The rules-based international system protects us all, and we must ensure its integrity. In that regard, we reiterate our full support for the OPCW — the independent international organization charged with overseeing the chemical-weapons ban.

Mr. Zhang Dianbin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China listened closely to the briefing by the representative of the United Kingdom.

China categorically opposes the use of chemical weapons by any State, organization or individual, regardless of the circumstances or purposes. China supports the comprehensive, objective and fair investigation of the alleged use of a chemical weapon, which, based on solid evidence, should lead to findings that are factual. That has been our clear and consistent position.

We have followed developments following the Salisbury incident in March. We believe that relevant issues should be addressed in accordance with the rules and procedures of the Chemical Weapons Convention and within the framework of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

We note the letter dated 5 September 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom addressed to the President of the Security Council. We also note that the parties concerned have not reached conclusions acceptable to all parties on issues including who should be held responsible for the incident. In that regard, parties should work on the basis of mutual respect and equal consultation and resolve the issue through dialogue.

At a time when the international community continues to face many challenges, parties should work with, instead of against, each other. It is important to maintain focus on the merits of the incident and avoid politicization and moves that could fuel tensions. Members of the Security Council should remain united

in a common effort to fulfil their duty to maintain international peace and security.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): Having heard today's update on the current situation surrounding the investigation into this well-known incident, my delegation would also like to share its observations on the topic.

First, we appreciate the diligent work of the United Kingdom on the case and the fact that it shared its information with us. However, reviewing such a serious matter requires additional time, in particular to study the findings of the British investigation.

Secondly, it is difficult to arrive at an objective assessment, especially with regard to the conclusions based on the United Kingdom letter of 5 September. We would appreciate receiving more concrete data before drawing any conclusions.

Thirdly, while actions should always be taken, decisions should not be made in haste. As we can see, with time, we will receive increasingly specific information pertaining to the incident, which will eventually enable us to make a fair and objective assessment and conclusion.

As a country that has been affected by the consequences of the use of weapons of mass destruction, we express our sincere solidarity with those who have suffered and are suffering from such weapons today. We remain firmly committed to the fight against the use of chemical weapons and are ready to play a constructive role in preventing such atrocious incidents.

Kazakhstan counts on the continuation of comprehensive, objective and transparent investigations and calls on the parties not act hastily without providing full and irrefutable evidence of the involvement of one side or the other.

Lastly, we think that the Council, as the main body for ensuring international peace and security, should remain consistent in acting on solid facts, based on evidence, in order to make objective and transparent decisions.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): We thank the delegation of the United Kingdom for its briefing and updates on the outcome of its investigation of the Salisbury incident. We also take note of the statement delivered by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Parliament, which was circulated among members of the Security Council yesterday. Furthermore, we have seen the summary of the report on activities carried out by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in support of a request for technical assistance by the United Kingdom, which was released two days ago.

Our position on the use of chemical weapons is well known, and we strongly condemn any use of chemical weapons by any State or non-State actor. It is unacceptable and constitutes a serious violation under international law. Nevertheless, we understand that a number of issues still require further clarification, and unfortunately we do not have all the necessary information before us.

One thing is very clear, however. Cooperation between the United Kingdom and the Russian Federation is absolutely vital in getting to the bottom of this issue. That should be done in good faith and a fair manner by undertaking the necessary consultation and exchange of information. That is what will help address the issue once and for all in a way that would allay the concerns of the United Kingdom and ultimately bring those responsible to justice.

Mrs. Cordova Soria (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We have taken note of the information provided today.

Bolivia reiterates its position of categorically rejecting the use of chemical compounds as weapons, since such use is an unjustifiable and criminal act and a serious crime under international law and undermines international peace and security. Their use by whomever and in whatever circumstances is heinous and constitutes a serious assault on human rights, the perpetrators of which must be identified and brought to justice.

This event sets a sensitive precedent, as it threatens the non-proliferation regime and therefore runs contrary to the provisions established by the Chemical Weapons Convention. We reiterate the need for an independent, transparent, objective, impartial and depoliticized investigation in accordance with the current norms of international law, mainly within the framework of the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention. We reiterate the need for an independent investigation.

With regard to the March events, it is essential that the countries concerned turn to the corresponding diplomatic channels so as to comply with the principles

of mutual respect and bilateral cooperation, which will enable a solution to this issue to be reached. In that regard, making charges and accusations without engaging in the necessary dialogue and transparent exchange of information between the parties will not contribute to that goal. Lastly, we call for dialogue and respect to prevail as the situation develops.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): Equatorial Guinea has followed the developments in the events related to the use of a chemical agent in Salisbury on 4 March with concern. We are carefully following the current investigations aimed at full clarification of the incident. We expect them to be exhaustive, fair and independent, and in accordance with the relevant international norms.

Equatorial Guinea opposes the manufacture, storage and use of chemical weapons, which contravene the Chemical Weapons Convention and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and advocates for their complete prohibition and destruction. We hope that those responsible for their use, wherever that may occur, will be brought to international justice. We firmly condemn the attack on the lives of members of the Skripal family in Salisbury. We stand in solidarity with the British people, especially with the family of the victims who died as a result of this abominable crime.

Equatorial Guinea reiterates its hope that the parties concerned — the United Kingdom and the Russian Federation — will display moderation and find a way to manage the situation in an appropriate and reasonable manner while maintaining direct contact with one another.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea reaffirms its conviction that the complete and effective prohibition of chemical weapons and their destruction is a necessary step in realizing the purposes and principles of the Charter, especially the maintenance of international peace and security.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We listened attentively to the statement by our British colleague, who had promised to provide new information on the investigation of the so-called Skripal affair. We have also carefully studied the statement by Britain's Prime Minister, Theresa May, to Parliament on the same topic. To be frank, we had very much hoped that today we would hear something convincing that could shed light on this mysterious incident. Unfortunately, our hopes were once again disappointed. In today's statement we heard the same litany of lies about so-called double agents being legitimate targets for murder by Russian special intelligence services; about the training of Russian special services in the handling of toxic chemicals; about Russia's development of military-grade chemical agents in Russia; about cyberattacks and attempts to engineer a coup d'état in Macedonia, and a whole lot more. I will not list this whole crazy cocktail of unfounded lies. Similar insinuations were heard from the British Prime Minister yesterday.

We learned only yesterday that the heroic British investigators released photographs of two individuals suspected of poisoning Sergei and Yulia Skripal. Today the British authorities are trying to proclaim it a sensation and a turning point in the investigation. Those individuals supposedly have Russian surnames and citizenship, and with that degree of certainty that is now so familiar to us, it is said to be "highly likely" that they are part of Russia's intelligence services. At the same time, it was immediately assumed that the names given were aliases. Furthermore, unlike in the situation with the previous unsubstantiated provocation of this type, the Litvinenko affair, the British have stated that they do not intend to request the suspects' extradition from Russia. Just as they have no intention of cooperating with the Russian authorities. Indeed, why bother with that? It does not suit London's game plan. In their statements today, many delegations urged Russia to cooperate with Great Britain. But in actuality the situation is precisely the opposite. It is we who are asking London to cooperate, not London asking us. And London is refusing that cooperation. London needs this affair for one reason and one reason only, which is to unleash hateful anti-Russian hysteria and drag other countries into it.

The number of inconsistencies and open questions in connection with Britain's new so-called evidence is off the charts. For example, the stamps on the photographs of the suspects supplied by London in which they are shown walking along an identical corridor, allegedly at Gatwick Airport, are timed to coincide to a fraction of a second. According to the data cited by Theresa May, the suspects appeared at the Skripals' house around noon on 4 March, although all the earlier police reports stated that the Skripals had left the house early that morning and did not return. So how did they come in contact with their house's allegedly poisoned doorknob? It is also hardly convincing that the suspects transported

the mythical Novichok in an ordinary perfume bottle. According to the published reports of experts from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) specifically with regard to the incident in Amesbury, the substance is so toxic and dangerous that special protective containers have to be used to transport it, or the person carrying it would inevitably be the first to fall victim to it.

There is a popular joke in Russia about a character named Uncatchable Joe. He is uncatchable not because no one can catch him but because nobody needs him or is even looking for him. I have a distinct feeling that we have been presented with two such uncatchable Joes, allegedly acting on orders from Moscow. Perhaps someone here finds this play convincing, but to me this new act seems just as cooked up and far-fetched as the previous acts, some of which unfolded in this Chamber.

Our British colleagues have taken a very convenient position. The verdict has been pronounced, the guilty party — Russia — has been declared, the suspects' real names are unknown, but it is alleged that they are employees of the Russian Military Intelligence Service. Although how that can be determined without their names is a big puzzle to us.

We have been called on to cooperate. As I said, it was we who asked London to cooperate, which was categorically refused from day one. Yesterday the British Ambassador was summoned to the Russian Foreign Ministry, where in answer to a request, he said that the British authorities would not hand over the information to the Russians that the suspects would have had to submit to the Embassy when applying for a visa. And yet that information even includes fingerprints, which would make identifying them much easier than from a picture on the Internet. Not that there is anything surprising about that. In the post-truth world created by our Western colleagues, a world of delirium and fakery, it is quite sufficient to pronounce sentence before bringing a verdict and even to begin punishment. London is not about to see this affair through to the end. It does not need to.

Since we have met here once again to listen to revelations from London, let us go over the broad outlines of what we have been presented with since the attempted murder in Salisbury on 4 March. We have two Russian citizens who have been exposed to a mysterious nerve agent, who are being held somewhere and to whom neither Russian consular employees nor close relatives are permitted access, in violation of all sorts of international legal and humanitarian norms. That is a fact. All we saw was Yulia Skripal's television appearance, which aroused a lot of questions and suspicions about the possibility that she was under serious moral and psychological pressure.

There is a letter in the form of an ultimatum to Russia demanding that it admit to the attempt on the Skripals' lives. There are also several letters from Russia to the British authorities proposing that it be included in the investigation and with an impressive list of specific questions that have gone unanswered. Lastly, there is the conclusion by the OPCW experts that a nerve agent, whose country of origin they were unable to establish, was used in Salisbury on 4 March. They were unable to establish it because it is impossible in principle.

And this is where the facts end. All the rest is mere speculation generated by the rich imagination and Russophobic fantasy of London officialdom. Our British colleagues simply pay no heed to the obvious contradictions in the investigation's conclusions, leaked out in calculated doses by the media, spinning new and ever more absurd versions. I will not list them, since I value my own time and that of Council members. I will only say that six months down the road, it is impossible to comprehend why Russia might want to poison the Skripals or why it should have done it in such a strange, recherché and illogical way. We were told that a gel was applied to the handle, but now Theresa May says that apparently the suspects brought it with them and used a perfume bottle. There are a ton of such inconsistencies.

The unfounded conclusions that it was Moscow that did all this were abundant, and were followed by concrete sanctions. It appears that in this continuing theatre of the absurd, the only winner is the Nina Ricci company, whose products are getting free advertising in their capacity as the container for the mythical Novichok. Anyone who has not yet lost hope of finding the perpetrators realized long ago that the British authorities still have no evidence of Russia's involvement in the Salisbury incident, or in fact any reasonable versions of what happened at all. To be honest, we have already lost hope. For us, therefore, the question is only what new ploys they will come up with in London in order to avoid a really serious investigation of the Skripal affair, rather than a politically motivated one. Unfortunately, the so-called sensation we were presented with today fits that simple

scheme perfectly. By the way, we have no problems with ordinary English citizens, for whom we have sympathy and respect, and who were able to see that during the World Cup in Russia. Our problem is only with the British Government, which is misleading not only the international community but its own citizens.

In conclusion, I would like to switch to more formal language and, in summary form, state the following. The Russian Federation firmly rejects all the groundless accusations of its involvement in the poisoning with toxic chemicals in the city of Salisbury in March 2018 of the Russian citizens Sergei and Yulia Skripal, as was again reiterated by Britain's Prime Minister Theresa May in a speech in Parliament on 5 September. We urge the British to show restraint. We affirm our willingness to hold consultations in accordance with the bilateral Consular Convention of 2 December 1965 and the European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters of 20 April 1959. We demand consular access to Russian citizens who have been illegally detained by the British authorities.

We once again in full responsibility declare that the statements by the authorities in London, misleading the international community, to the effect that Russia alone could have possessed and now possesses the technical means, practical experience and motive for the commission of such acts using poisonous substances, are groundless. The Russian Federation has never developed, produced or stockpiled the toxic chemicals referred to in the West as Novichok. The very word "Novichok", as well as information about the structure and spectrum of this chemical compound, began to appear in foreign specialized scientific literature and applied databases based on information provided by Soviet defectors with only indirect connections to the former military chemical-weapon programme of the Soviet Union. Moreover, similar development was also being conducted in a number of other countries, including the United Kingdom, the United States and other Western States, and with the direct involvement of the Porton Down laboratory in the United Kingdom. There are volumes of specialized literature in the West about this research. The involvement of Porton Down is particularly important to an understanding of what happened in the Skripal case, as used by London against Russia and in the most recent incident, in Amesbury, in which the victims were British citizens. The Russian Federation appeals to all States to consider what has occurred with full responsibility and due understanding, and to support our call to the British Government to begin consultations with the Russian Federation in the context of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the other two aforementioned conventions.

In conclusion, what is clear from London's statement is that it already had all the information presented yesterday as long ago as May. If they had not determined the possible suspects and established the fact that they had been in Salisbury, there would have been no reason to search the hotel where they stayed. Clarly, if all the so-called evidence were as important as is claimed, it would have been published four months ago, before the tragic events in Amesbury. We can conclude only one thing from all of this, which is that Downing Street is governed not by the interests of seeing justice done but by other motives, which we have already mentioned.

The incident on 4 March became a useful pretext to whip up anti-Russian hysteria, and was used to undermine our authority as a State party to the Chemical Weapons Convention on the eve of the staged use of chemical weapons in the Syrian city of Douma. We are seeing a similar picture today. The statement by Theresa May on 5 September took place on the eve of what we might call the new political season, and around the situation in Idlib, which is being actively discussed, and the chemical-weapon provocation that the militants, together with the White Helmets, have been preparing there, and which we have warned about more than once. We will circulate the relevant materials on the topic of today's meeting to the States Members of the United Nations.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United States.

This morning the Security Council is addressing the use of chemical weapons for the first of two times today. As we have done previously, the United States expresses its unequivocal condemnation of the use of chemical weapons, in Salisbury or anywhere else. We stand firm in defence of the international norm against the use of these horrific weapons, and we stand firm with the British people.

It is easy to express outrage, of course. We do it every day in this Chamber. What is difficult is finding solutions. Today our British friends and colleagues are providing us with a master class on how to stop the spread of chemical weapons. They are creating accountability for those who use chemical agents and

are providing vital support for the international norm against the use of these deadly, illegal weapons. The British Government is pursuing accountability for this attack in the only way accountability can truly be accomplished, that is, in accordance with the rule of law.

British investigators have conducted a full and fair investigation of what has been determined to be the attempted killings of Sergei and Yulia Skripal and Detective Nick Bailey. The investigators have linked those crimes with the chemical agent that poisoned Charlie Rowley and killed Dawn Sturgess. Prime Minister May went into great detail about each step of the investigation. Hundreds of detectives have analysed thousands of hours of closed circuit television (CCTV) footage and thousands of documents. Some things we knew already. British investigators had already concluded that Russia was responsible for the exposure of hundreds of people to a deadly agent on the streets of Salisbury. Now, thanks to the careful, methodical work of the British authorities, no one should have any doubts. It is actually amazing to see the clarity and undeniability of the results.

The British Government has identified two Russian nationals as responsible for the use of the Novichok nerve agent on British soil and the attempted murder of a British citizen and his daughter. Critically, the British have also concluded that the two men are officers of the Russian Military Intelligence Service. This was not, as Prime Minister May said, a rogue operation. It was a highly planned, purposely driven attack. The British have the suspects on CCTV from their arrival at Gatwick Airport, to their travel to the vicinity of the Skripals' house on the day of the attack, and finally their departure from Heathrow back to Moscow. Every one of us in the Chamber and listening around the world should be chilled to the bone by the findings of this investigation. As for the subsequent poisoning of Charlie Rowley and the death of Dawn Sturgess, Prime Minister May said it well:

> "Were these two suspects within our jurisdiction, there would be a clear basis in law for their arrest for murder."

That is how it is done. That is how individuals who commit murder and their heinous crimes are exposed. That is how nations that defy the international norms that keep us all safe are held to account. That is how the memories of those injured and killed, and the service of the first responders who cared for them, are honoured. It now falls to us to do our part.

Rather than accept responsibility for its actions, the Russian Government has offered only denials and counter-accusations, anything to deflect attention and distract from its guilt. The Russian denials have followed a familiar script. From Crimea to Malaysia Airlines Flight MH-17 to Donbas to the killing of Litvinenko, the list goes on and on. And the song is always the same: Russia is somehow never behind these incidents. But no one is buying it. The most recent British action will ensure that Russia does not get away with this brazen attack. In direct response to Russia's use of chemical weapons in the Salisbury incident, the United States has announced additional sanctions against Russia. As we acted together with our NATO allies and other partners, 153 Russian officials were expelled around the world in response to the attack on the Skripals on British soil.

While this incident was in Salisbury, who is to say it could not have happened in Paris, Amsterdam or Addis Ababa? We must now help our British friends find the two Russian suspects they have identified and bring them to face justice in the United Kingdom. Better yet, why can the Russian Government not turn those two murderers over to British authorities? We must fight and win the broader battle against impunity for the use of chemical weapons. This is a day for explanations from Russia, and solidarity with our colleagues in the United Kingdom.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The representative of the United Kingdom has asked to make a further statement.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank colleagues for the views and expressions of solidarity and support. I also thank those colleagues who repeated their revulsion at the use of chemical weapons wherever and whenever it occurs. I just want to make it very clear that the United Kingdom shares that position about bolstering the international prohibition on the use of chemical weapons.

I was asked a number of questions, Madam President, so with your permission I will respond briefly.

I was asked about the investigation. I would just like to recall for my colleagues that in the United Kingdom, the police are independent of Government.

The investigation has been independent. The one into the murder of Dawn Sturgess, which is ongoing, is also independent. We believe that it is methodical and comprehensive.

I was asked about inconsistencies in the evidence identifying the two Russian individuals as Russian Military Intelligence Service (GRU) operatives. We have closed-circuit television footage. We are happy to share those images with colleagues. To take one instance, the Russian Ambassador mentioned that there was a time stamp in the same corridor for both individuals. I do not know if the Ambassador has been to Gatwick Airport. We have been to Gatwick Airport. There are multiple identical corridors through which people can go. That is what happened to the two Russians. We are confident in our evidence, and I am very happy to talk to any colleague. Indeed, any member of the General Assembly who has doubts about the evidence is very welcome to come and have a briefing at the British Mission.

I was also asked about cooperation with the Russian authorities. I would like to recall for Council colleagues that when this episode first happened in March, my Government went to the Russian authorities and asked for their cooperation. We were given a reply that the request for cooperation was null and void. We would have been happy to collaborate with the Russian authorities at the time. We have indicated our willingness to do so since that point, but in fact what we have seen is a diversion into avenues that are not relevant to this particular case. I think that is a great pity. The Russians also asked us if they could join the investigation once it was under way. I have said before in this Chamber, and I repeat it, that you do not recruit an arsonist to put out a fire. You especially do not do that when the fire is one that the arsonist caused.

I was asked about GRU operatives using fake names. The names may be fake but the crimes are real. The time for lies and discrimination has passed, and it is now time for truth and accountability. We have not assumed that the Russians are guilty. We have done an investigation. The assumption of guilt over innocence may happen in the Russian judicial system. It does not happen in the United Kingdom's, but I do think there is an interesting question for the Russian authorities as to whether the GRU operatives were incompetent in what they did to leave traces or whether they were rogue. I think that is an important angle to think about.

We were accused of not granting consular access to the Skripals. In fact, as I have told the Council, we did pass on the details from the Russian Consulate in London to Yulia Skripal, and it was her wishes that we followed in all subsequent contact. I am glad to say that Yulia is making a good recovery. We have had no other thought in our dealings with her than her welfare and her wishes.

We are now up to some 37 accounts from Russia as to why and how Salisbury took place. I think that none of them hold water. We believe that the evidence we have presented speaks for itself, but I repeat that I am very happy to give any Member of the United Nations that would so wish a briefing on that. We should recall that a woman has died, two people have narrowly escaped death, a whole city was placed at risk, and the global chemical-weapon non-proliferation regime has also been placed at risk. I would hope that the Russians would respect the Council, engage on the facts and accept the compelling evidence of Russian complicity in this crime.

As regards the British allegations against Russia about Douma, I think again that this shows that many Russian authorities work in a parallel universe where facts and international norms are inverted. We abhor the use of chemical weapons. We take our responsibilities under the Chemical Weapons Convention extremely seriously. We call on the Syrian authorities and the Russian authorities who work with them not to use chemical weapons against their own people and not to repeat the experience of eastern Ghouta and Douma. But as you, Madam, our French colleagues and the United Kingdom have made clear, we will uphold our international responsibilities and we will uphold the international commitments and obligations that the international community has laid down.

In conclusion, the world is poorer owing to the fact that Russia, a permanent member of the Security Council, will not join us in doing precisely that to uphold the international order.

The President: The representative of the Russian Federation has asked to make a further statement.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Unfortunately, I have not learned anything new from my British colleague's further statement. We heard the same set of unsubstantiated accusations that we have heard in previous meetings. I would like to mention a couple of factual things. As I said about

consular access to Yulia and Sergei Skripal, we do not have that access. Another significant fact is that Yulia Skripal's own sister, who lives in Russia and who wanted to visit her — and Yulia had given her consent to that — has twice been refused a visa for the United Kingdom by the British Embassy. Does that not tell us something?

With regard to the request that the British allegedly made to Russia immediately after the incident, we have already had the pleasure of commenting more than once on the nature of that request, which was no request at all. It was the then British Foreign Minister Boris Johnson's demand of the Russian Ambassador in London that Russia admit to the crime and say how it was committed, whether with the knowledge of the Russian authorities or by misunderstanding or lack of oversight. That was in fact the entire so-called request for cooperation with Russia. There should be no misleading of the international community here. There was no request from the British for Russia's cooperation in investigating this case. On the contrary, Russia's repeated requests, both within the framework of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and in other ways, for conducting a joint investigation with the British confirmed our readiness to engage fully in this.

Of course, I understand that our British colleague said that we live in parallel universes — and perhaps some people would like us to live on another planet — but there are no colonized planets yet, so we must live on the one we have. And on this planet we will have to cooperate, whether others like it or not. And to most of the questions we have laid out — and there are more than 40 of them — there are still no answers. Just as there are no multiple Russian versions of what happened, something that the British representative tried to say today, suggesting that journalistic versions represent the position of the Russian authorities. We too will be happy to give a briefing to interested delegations on how we see the situation, on what has happened and what is now happening with Britain's so-called investigation.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8344

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8344th meeting
Thursday, 6 September 2018, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mrs. Haley	(United States of America)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Tenya
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 28 August 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/804)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 28 August 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/804)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/804, which contains a letter dated 28 August 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to Ms. Nakamitsu.

Ms. Nakamitsu: I thank the members of the Security Council for the opportunity to brief them on the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013), on the elimination of the chemical weapons programme of the Syrian Arab Republic.

As per long-standing practice, I met yesterday with the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic in advance of these consultations. In addition, I remain in regular contact with the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and spoke to him this past Tuesday, 4 September.

As the Council was informed in July (see S/2018/745), the OPCW Technical Secretariat has verified the destruction of all 27 chemical weapons-production facilities declared by the Syrian Arab Republic. That is an important step towards the full implementation of resolution 2118 (2013).

Efforts to clarify the outstanding issues regarding the initial declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic are ongoing. As members are aware, on 10 July the OPCW received a letter from the Syrian Arab Republic in response to questions regarding chemical weapons-related activities conducted at the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre. Those questions were attached to a 10 April letter from the OPCW Director-General. The OPCW's Declaration Assessment Team is continuing to analyse the answers provided by the Syrian Arab Republic and will report in due course to the OPCW Executive Council.

The Secretary-General continues to urge cooperation by the Government of Syria with the OPCW in resolving the outstanding issues related to Syria's declaration. As I have noted on many occasions, the confidence of the international community in the full elimination of Syria's chemical weapons programme depends upon the OPCW being able to close those outstanding issues. The complete implementation of resolution 2118 (2013) is critical not only to finding a long-overdue end to the ongoing conflict in Syria, but also to stability in the region in the longer term. In this regard, I welcome the news conveyed to me by the Director-General of the renewal of the Tripartite Agreement between the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, the OPCW and the United Nations Office for Project Services. This will allow the OPCW to continue its activities in Syria using the same logistics procedures and support as in the past.

As the Council has been previously informed, on 6 July the OPCW Technical Secretariat issued a note entitled "Interim report of the OPCW Fact-finding Mission in Syria regarding the incident of alleged use of toxic chemicals as a weapon in Douma, Syrian Arab Republic, on 7 April 2018", which was subsequently circulated to the Security Council through the Secretary-General. On 7 August, the OPCW received a note verbale from the Syrian Arab Republic that provided comments on the interim report. The Fact-finding Mission (FFM) continues to collect and analyse information with regard to the alleged use of toxic chemicals as a weapon in Douma and will provide a final report on its findings in due course. I reiterate my full support for the integrity and professionalism of the work of the OPCW and its Fact-finding Mission, and look forward to the final report on this incident.

The FFM has also requested and was provided with, documents pertaining to four reported incidents currently under investigation by the National Authority of the Syrian Arab Republic: two incidents in Kharbit Masasnah on 7 July 2017 and 4 August 2017; one

incident in Al-Salamiyah on 9 August 2017; and another incident in Souran on 8 November 2017. The FFM is continuing to translate and analyse the information contained in those documents.

At its fourth special session last June, the Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, inter alia, decided that the OPCW Secretariat

> "shall put in place arrangements to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic ... in those instances in which the OPCW Fact-finding Mission in Syria determines or has determined that use or likely use occurred, as well as cases for which the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism had not issued a report".

On 27 July, the OPCW Director-General provided a report to States parties and to the Secretary-General on the initial implementation of the decision. The Secretary-General has taken note of the decision adopted at the OPCW Conference of States Parties in June and looks forward to the Director-General's next progress report, which will be issued to the OPCW's Executive Council at its eighty-ninth session, next month.

The lack of a mechanism to attribute responsibility to those who have used chemical weapons has been deeply troubling and a missing step on the path towards accountability. The closure of the United Nations-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism, which was mandated to identify the perpetrators of such acts, emboldened those who sought to carry out further attacks. Anyone who uses chemical weapons must be identified and held to account.

The Security Council holds the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, which is threatened by the use of weapons of mass destruction. The adoption of the June decision in the OPCW, therefore, does not lessen the need for unity in the Security Council. The Secretary-General has repeatedly expressed his willingness to assist the Council, and I reiterate his calls on Council members to work together to find a common approach to tackling this issue, which has become one of the most critical challenges to the maintenance of international peace and security. Like the Secretary-General, the Office for Disarmament Affairs stands ready to assist.

I would like to recall the remarks made by the Secretary-General in this Chamber on 14 April, when he stated: "Any use of chemical weapons is abhorrent, and the suffering it causes is horrendous" (*S/PV.8233, p. 2*). In that regard, I underline that the use of any toxic chemical, such as chlorine, as a weapon by any party and under any circumstances is totally unacceptable.

Last week, the Secretary-General expressed his deep concern about the growing risks of a humanitarian catastrophe in the event of a full-scale military operation in Idlib province. Before concluding, I wish to reiterate that it is of vital importance that humanitarian principles be upheld, that all relevant international disarmament and non-proliferation norms — most importantly the Chemical Weapons Convention — be fully respected, and that all sides work together to avoid further escalation in Syria, including in and around Idlib.

The President: I thank Ms. Nakamitsu for her briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members wishing to make a statement.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): I thank High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu for her informative briefing and you, Madam President, for having organized this discussion in an open format. Transparency and openness are extremely important and necessary for objective discussions with sober assessments of exact recent or ongoing developments. We certainly need such a thorough approach, especially in the investigation of incidents related to the use of chemical weapons in Syria. The reports of the Fact-finding Mission on the Syrian Arab Republic do not yet provide us with the necessary clarity and objectivity, generating further disagreement among Council members.

The position of Kazakhstan on this issue remains firm and consistent. We do not tolerate the use of any kind of weapon of mass destruction, including chemical weapons. We support the prompt identification and prosecution of all those responsible for chemical crimes. However, the involvement of a party must be proved by full, comprehensive and irrefutable evidence.

The issues of attribution and prosecution have long represented a stumbling block in the work of the Council. This impasse has prevented us from achieving effective solutions. We, the members of the Council, must rise above our geopolitical interests. Instead of polarizing the deliberations with our views and prejudices, we must all think seriously about further joint and integrated action.

We must remember that the political settlement of the Syrian crisis and the fight against the threat of chemical weapons in Syria are closely interrelated. We must not allow chemical incidents, deliberately organized for destructive purposes, to undermine our achievements in the political dimension and detract from the prospects for long-awaited peace in Syria. Existing threats should be considered in that context.

In the report of the Director General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) before us today (see S/2018/804), we see both positive aspects and cause for concern. We agree with the Secretary-General that the long-awaited destruction of all 27 chemical weapon-production facilities in Syria is an important step towards the full implementation of resolution 2118 (2013). The report also indicates certain progress in obtaining answers from the Syrian Government on issues regarding its chemical weapons declaration. We look forward to the further cooperation of the Government of Syria with the OPCW in order to eliminate all remaining ambiguities. We eagerly await the results of the analysis by the Declaration Assessment Team of the responses submitted by the Syrian authorities.

At the same time, we are very concerned about other circumstances. Questions remain unclear in the following areas.

There is a lack of clarity about all ongoing investigations of chemical incidents, including the Douma incident, which would allow us to see how and by whom chemical weapons have been used and seriously affected the common people of Syria.

The lack of impunity and absence of preventive measures do not allow us to effectively address the continued threat of chemical-weapons use in the country or the fear that chemical attacks are not only being used as a tactical tool of warfare and liquidation of the enemy, which is also unacceptable in our times, but also as an instrument of terror that sows chaos among people to achieve certain benefits for one particular party.

The provocative nature of such actions is a real threat to our collective efforts to achieve peace and stability in the Syrian Arab Republic. We should not allow the politicization and polarization of this serious matter, on which the fate of many depends. We must also fight intentional provocations and planned deliberate attacks.

Kazakhstan calls for constructive and patient consultations and the tireless search for mutually acceptable solutions for the benefit of the people of Syria.

Mr. Tenya (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We appreciate the convening of this meeting and thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, for the valuable information she has provided.

Peru condemns any use of chemical weapons. We believe that such a practice constitutes, in and of itself, a threat to international peace and security, a heinous crime and a flagrant violation of the non-proliferation regime and international humanitarian law. With that in mind, we note with deep concern the recurrent allegations regarding the use of chemical weapons in Syria, and we are keeping a close eye on the results of the investigations being carried out by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). We believe it to be critical that such investigations be able to identify the perpetrators of those serious crimes, with a view to guaranteeing accountability and access to justice, as well as the effectiveness of an international rules-based order.

On that note, we wish to reaffirm our full confidence in the professional work being carried out by the OPCW in Syria and our recognition of the dedication of its personnel in particularly difficult conditions. We note some progress, such as the completion of the process of destruction of the 27 chemical weapons-production facilities recognized by the Syrian Government.

We regret, however, that those advances are continually overshadowed by systematic errors and omissions in Syria's declaration, five years after its accession to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction. We hope that the documentation recently provided by the Syrian Government, which is currently under evaluation by the OPCW, will finally make it possible to clear up the existing discrepancies.

In conclusion, we reaffirm that Peru will continue to be guided by a comprehensive evaluation of the situation and by our ongoing commitment to international law and the protection of civilians on this matter.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Under-Secretary-General of Disarmament Affairs for her clear and enlightening briefing.

It is no secret that this meeting is taking place against an extremely worrying backdrop, in the light of which I will make three series of observations regarding the threat of a large-scale offensive in Idlib, potentially involving the use of chemical weapons; the state of play of the Syrian chemical file; and lastly, the urgenct need a political solution and the priority that must be given to the protection of civilians.

Let us get straight to the facts. Syria is once again on the brink of an abyss. I would ask everyone here to carefully consider what a major attack on Idlib would mean. There are nearly 3 million inhabitants in the city, more than half of whom are internally displaced. Such an attack, in the context that I have just outlined, would have disastrous humanitarian, migratory and security consequences that would open a new chapter in the long Syrian tragedy. Such an attack would indeed produce an absolute humanitarian tragedy, with deadly attacks on civilians, indiscriminate air raids and the use of prohibited weapons, notably chemical weapons, by the regime, while civilians would have nowhere to go. Such an attack would also generate a major migration crisis towards northern Syria, Turkey and potentially Europe and beyond. Finally, such a major attack would pose a serious threat to regional security, particularly through the spread of jihadist fighters, who are also in the area.

In the light of the threat of such a disaster, we are fully mobilized and wholly determined. The priority of our collective efforts must be to respect the ceasefire in the area, and today, on behalf of France, I call on Russia and Iran to use their influence on the Syrian regime to achieve that. The supporters of Damascus have the means to prevent such a crisis, because the regime cannot act alone.

We also remain extremely vigilant in the light of the risk of chemical weapons use. As we have said on several occasions, notably alongside the United Kingdom and the United States, any new and verified use of such weapons by the Bashar Al-Assad regime would not go unpunished. Our political leaders have expressed themselves unambiguously on that point.

As I said, there is currently a particularly serious and high risk of such activity. It is no secret that the Syrian regime has not stopped using chemical weapons since 2013, in violation of its international commitments and of the most essential principles, values and rules of law. The regime has pursued its strategy of crushing any opposition by resorting to the most terrifying weapons, while conducting a cynical campaign of misinformation that is propagated by its allies.

Hundreds of civilians paid the price for that in Douma, in April, as well as in Khan Shaykhun, one year earlier, in April 2017. I remind those who would once again try to deny or qualify the reality of the facts or to try and cause confusion that the regime of Bashar Al-Assad has already been formally identified, on several occasions, as having the capacity to use sarin, chlorine and gas on civilians — capacity that it has used.

Let there be no mistake — the Syrian chemical weapons programme has not been dismantled. The continued use of chemical weapons in Syria is an irrefutable indication that stocks of both sarin and chlorine exist. We have taken note of the reports of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) noting the destruction of all declared facilities and the transmission of information by the Syrian regime. However, I remind the Council that the regime has never sincerely cooperated with the OPCW and that, to date, it remains impossible to confirm if the regime declared all of its inventories and capacities in 2013.

In that edifying context, we therefore call on Syria's allies to take full responsibility for preventing further escalation and banning the use of chemical weapons. The meeting of the Astana Group countries tomorrow must establish clear commitments on their part to maintaining the ceasefire of which they are guarantors; avoiding a military escalation, which would be disastrous in humanitarian terms; and protecting civilians in an area that, I recall, is supposed to be a de-escalation zone.

Such action is imperative for Syria and for the international community. The re-emergence of weapons of terror poses a serious threat to the security of each of our countries and to the entire non-proliferation regime. We therefore have a collective moral, legal and political responsibility to prevent and deter the use of such weapons. The perpetrators of chemical atrocities in Syria and elsewhere must know that they cannot act with impunity and that they will be held accountable. That is the goal of the international partnership against impunity for the use of chemical weapons and the mechanism for identifying those responsible being

established in The Hague t. It is also one of the reasons for our support for the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, which must be able to complete its work. There can be no lasting peace without justice.

In conclusion, I stress once again the particular gravity of the current situation, the responsibility incumbent upon us all to act, and the importance of fully mobilizing the Council and, more broadly, the international community to that end. The military preparations under way in Idlib and the presence within that enclave of a concentration of terrorist fighters and several million civilians, including many displaced persons, are creating conditions that could lead to a humanitarian and security disaster that we must and can prevent together if we pool our efforts. Such a scenario would seriously undermine all the efforts under way to find a political solution, under the auspices of United Nations mediation and with the support of the Council, and would represent a major setback.

The priority must be to respect the ceasefire, the protection of civilians and full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access. France therefore calls on the Astana guarantors to maintain the de-escalation and avoid the escalation of violence, with the primary concern being to protect civilian populations. We are at a crossroads. We can either once again plunge into chaos or rally around United Nations mediation led by Staffan de Mistura, which provides us with a way out by promoting the establishment of a constitutional committee in the coming weeks — the cornerstone of a lasting political solution that, if we are able to pool our efforts, is within reach. Let us therefore not allow the conflict to regress into violent escalation.

We will have an opportunity to rally together at the upcoming session of the General Assembly. On behalf of France, I call on everyone today to rise as one to the occasion. It is in our and the Syrians' best interests.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to thank Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for her briefing. We express our gratitude to the Technical Secretariat, the Declaration Assessment Team and the Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for their professional work and commitment to serving our common goal of a world free of chemical weapons. Let me reiterate that Poland takes note of the fact that the OPCW Technical Secretariat has verified the destruction of all declared chemical weapons-production facilities. At the same time, we hope that communication between the OPCW and Syria will continue so that all existing gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies with regard to the Syrian initial declaration can be clarified. We also thank the Fact-finding Mission for its interim report on activities related to the incident in Douma. We are looking forward to the Mission's final report.

We are already discussing the fifty-ninth OPCW report today, which means that for almost five years the Security Council and international community have been unable to mitigate the threat posed by chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. It does not mean, however, that this body is incapable of doing so. The establishment of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism demonstrated that, when the Council is united around the common goal of countering weapons of mass destruction, it can work effectively.

Poland continues to condemn the use of chemical weapons anywhere, including in Syria, and is firmly convinced that those responsible for chemical attacks must be held accountable. It is crucial to preserving the integrity of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Therefore, we are looking forward to the development by the OPCW of arrangements necessary to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in Syria, in accordance with the decision of the fourth special session of the Conference of States Parties to the CWC.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing.

The tenor of the discussion in the Security Council on the topic of the chemical demilitarization of Syria does not align with the actual state of affairs and derives from the persistent anti-Damascus attitudes of Western members of the Council. The Syrian military chemical potential was destroyed some time ago under the monitoring of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The organization in The Hague also confirmed the destruction of the last declared production facilities, in accordance with the Convention on the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (CWC). We agree with the Secretary-General that that was an

important step towards the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013).

Gaps and inconsistencies in the Syrian declaration are attributable to the fact that it was submitted under the pressure of time constraints, against the backdrop of an acute armed conflict. Subsequently, clarifications were made in full compliance with CWC rules. Some issues can no longer be clarified, given the number of years that have elapsed and must be put to rest. With regard to other issues, the Government of Syria has provided the OPCW in good faith with available information, and such interaction is the only way to resolve remaining misunderstandings. There is no foundation to allegations that Damascus allegedly retained elements from stocks of toxic substances. That is pure propaganda. Suffice it to recall that OPCW experts have inspected the research centre in Barzah very thoroughly on two occasions and found no trace of toxic substances. In April, that facility was destroyed by missile strikes by the United States, the United Kingdom and France under the pretext that it was allegedly producing and stockpiling chemical weapons, but no chemical traces were emitted during the attack. That clearly indicates a large-scale international deception on the part of the participants in the aggression, of a kind with the shameful adventure concerning Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. By the way, for some reason OPCW officials are embarrassed to mention the fact that the centre's destruction was caused by the bombing.

A characteristic feature of the conflict in Syria has been the provocation of militants from illegal armed entities through their use of toxic chemicals. For five years, the same primitive machinations have been used by international elements to discredit the authorities in Damascus and justify subsequent acts of aggression against Syria. Assistance in staging events to provoke an appropriate response is provided by the supposed rescuers, the White Helmets, who are living off Western money. They even use children in staging such events. Following the incident in Douma, this scheme was revealed when we managed to track down participants filming events, and they recounted everything at The Hague.

At present, a new wave of severe threats is being unleashed against Syria. The alleged intention of the Syrian Government to use chemical weapons in Idlib has been presented as fact. Agatha Christie's novel *A Murder is Announced*, in which the crime to be committed — including its time and place — is reported in the newspaper, comes to mind. The expectations of those who are curious and visit the address published by the newspaer are not disappointed. Contemporary prophets do not bother explaining why Damascus needs to poison its civilian population with gas in an environment in which Syria has already been bombed twice, and new acts of aggression are being hatched. Do others really believe that Damascus has called on them to do that? Do they really think that the whole world blindly believes those stories? Damascus has no chemical weapons and no plans to use them. We consider such warnings to be invitations to terrorists to stage a new chemical attack and accuse the Syrian authorities of it. The Syrian authorities do not need to do that, but it is key for terrorists, since it is a sure way to provoke an act of aggression against Damascus.

We know for certain, and we have provided the relevant information to the OPCW, that toxic chemicals and equipment for provocation were brought via complicated routes into the territory not controlled by the Syrian authorities; that militants were specially trained by Western special services; that the White Helmets and their allies are already present in Idlib; and that dozens of children in the province have been kidnapped. At the same time, the military presence of key Western countries is demonstratively growing near Syria, and their officials are making aggressive statements. We spoke about that at a meeting of the Security Council on 28 August (see S/PV.8332).

In that regard, we have a concrete proposal for our American colleagues, namely, that they should provide the list of targets that the Pentagon has reportedly identified for possible strikes of the troika. If the United States believes that they are related to the stockpiling and use of chemical weapons, then it must demonstrate its respect for the Charter of the United Nations and international law and inform the OPCW so that it can conduct chemical inspections pursuant to the Chemical Weapons Convention. Since the United States unreservedly believes in the authority and impartiality of the OPCW Fact-finding Mission, its expertise should allay any suspicions.

I would like to say a few words about the OPCW. We expect that the new Director-General of the OPCW, Mr. Arias González, will be able to restore the work of the organization to its normal pathway. After numerous remote investigations, its authority has suffered a serious blow. The OPCW was further undermined by the decision that a division of the Technical Secretariat

would identify those responsible for the use of chemical weapons, which was pushed through by a minority of member States. That was not legitimate because it is not in line with the goals of the Chemical Weapons Convention, and Russia does not recognize it. The sole purpose of that initiative is the purely political aim of undermining Syria and Russia internationally. That was made clear in the parliamentary statement delivered on 5 September by British Prime Minister Theresa May on the Salisbury-Amesbury incident.

Let us remember that pursuing such provoscation will lead only to a new exacerbation of tension in the Near East, which has already been heightened due to the policy carried out be Western countries, resulting in disunity. It is not just a matter of instability, but also of serious military conflicts that claim many innocent victims. It is hardly likely that the West's regional allies will benefit from that.

There was a point in time when questionable geopolitical games led to the proliferation of terrorism. Today, as a result of similar ventures, we are witnessing a surge in chemical terrorism. It is worth noting that the role of those countries in achieving a political settlement in Syria, about which they speak so fervently, is not very high-profile. We highly recommend that they cease hostilities and join in the efforts for peace.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): We thank High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing. We welcome the confirmation by the Director General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) that the Secretariat has verified the destruction of all 27 chemical weapons-production facilities declared by the Syrian Government. As the Secretary-General states in his letter,

> "the long-awaited completion of the issue constitutes an important step towards the full implementation of resolution 2118 (2013)" (*S/2018/804, p. 1*).

We understand that the OPCW has continued its endeavours to clarify all outstanding issues regarding the initial declaration of the Syrian Government. We also note that the OPCW is still analysing the response of the Syrian Government regarding the outstanding issues. While we await the report, we reiterate that all remaining matters should be resolved through continued and more productive communications between the Syrian Government and the OPCW.

After its interim report on the alleged use of chemical weapons in Douma, we note that the OPCW Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic (FFM) has continued to collect and analyse information related to the incident. We stress that all parties should cooperate with the FFM in its investigative work. In that regard, we look forward to the final report of the FFM. In addition, we note that the FFM is currently translating and analysing the documents it requested and received from the Syrian Government with regard to four incidents.

Our positions on the use of chemical weapons are well known. We strongly condemn any use of chemical weapons by any actor — State or non-State — under any circumstances. There cannot be any justification for using chemicals as weapons. Their use is a threat to international peace and security and endangers the global non-proliferation system. Those who use chemical weapons must be identified, based on robust evidence, and held accountable. We still believe that the unity of the Security Council is vital in that regard. Acting together, according to the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant Security Council relevant resolutions, we believe, is the best and most sustainable way to discourage and stop the use of chemical weapons in Syria and elsewhere.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I thank Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, and her team for their substantive briefing.

Equatorial Guinea welcomes the definitive destruction of the 27 chemical weapons-production facilities declared by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. The verification of that information was requested in previous meetings, and we should indeed be pleased that the Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) made all the arrangements necessary for the verification of that information. It is a significant step forward that should encourage the parties to take concrete steps towards the implementation of the relevant provisions of resolution 2118 (2013), and the members of the Security Council to return to unanimity in addressing this important and sensitive issue.

With regard to the security of OPCW personnel, we believe that access to places of investigation requires that the security of the Mission be guaranteed on a permanent basis, in accordance with the provisions of

the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, held on 26 and 27 June. In that regard, we encourage the OPCW secretariat to implement the new measures aimed at mitigating the high security risks proposed by the United Nations Department of Safety and Security.

The efforts and, above all, the contributions of countries and international organizations to the Trust Fund for Syrian Missions, which currently amounts to €17.1 million, deserve our praise. Those resources should undoubtedly be used to further support the activities of the OPCW in Syria.

Faced with the current context of the terrorist threat in north-western Syria and the offensives of the Syrian Government that are making progress in recovering territories, the parties must continue to consider the importance of upholding international treaties, especially the Chemical Weapons Convention. It is also worth recalling is that the authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic should prioritize their cooperation with the OPCW Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic so that no single case of chemical weapons use goes uninvestigated and that those responsible do not go unidentified.

The principled position of Equatorial Guinea on chemical weapons has not changed. It has always been clear and consistent. We are firmly opposed to the use of chemical weapons by any country, organization, group of States or person in any circumstance. The use of chemical weapons is unjustifiable and intolerable anywhere, at any time.

The Security Council and the OPCW are the primary channels for addressing the problem of Syrian chemical weapons. We recognize the important role they have played, and we hope that the stakeholders will adopt a constructive approach in order to find a solution through direct and unhindered dialogue that can prevent and put a definitive end to any future use of chemical weapons in the Arab Republic of Syria by any party. In that context, it is essential to create a mechanism to identify those responsible for the use of chemical weapons, to make formal accusations against them and to prosecute them. That will require the unity of the Security Council.

In conclusion, I reiterate that in the view of the Government of Equatorial Guinea, it is now understood that a political process is the only viable solution to the problem of the Syrian Arab Republic. The international community must continue cooperating with the parties concerned in order to reach a political solution that respects the sovereignty, the independence, the unity and the territorial integrity of the people of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the briefing of the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu.

My delegation reiterates the importance of the verification carried out by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Technical Secretariat with regard to the destruction of the last two facilities linked to the production of chemical weapons declared by the Syrian Arab Republic. We agree that the full and verifiable destruction of all such facilities is a key step in the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013). Following the response submitted by the Syrian Government to the OPCW Director-General's letter of 10 April, we are awaiting the analysis and conclusion of the OPCW's Declaration Assessment Team on that additional information. We also stress the importance of the United Nations Office for Project Services continuing to support the OPCW Fact-find Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic, in line with the Tripartite Agreement.

We welcome the planning of future visits by the OPCW secretariat to the sites identified in the third and fourth reports of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (see S/2016/738 and S/2016/888). We encourage the Secretariat to continue such visits in order to gather evidence that will make it possible to determine the possible use of chemical weapons. To that end, it is essential that any investigation into the use or possible use of chemical weapons, not only on Syrian territory but in any circumstance, should include on-site visits as a critical element, with the aim of conducting conclusive and verifiable investigations. In that connection, we reiterate our support for the OPCW Fact-finding Mission, in accordance with its mandate, to continue its work of investigation and verification of all alleged attacks with chemical weapons in the most objective, methodical and technical manner.

With regard to the incident involving the alleged use of toxic chemical substances as a weapon in the city of Douma, we reiterate the need for the investigation to follow a standard, independent and transparent protocol, with on-site visits as a key element, and we

await the collection and analysis of the information collected by the Fact-finding Mission to confirm the use of chemicals weapons and identify those responsible through the relevant mechanisms and in the framework of the Charter of the United Nations.

We wholeheartedly believe that, regardless of the powers granted to the secretariat and the Director-General of the OPCW at the fourth special session of the Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention in June, the Council still has the obligation to reach consensus on the creation of an independent, impartial and representative investigative mechanism to carry out a thorough, reliable and conclusive investigation that will make it possible to identify the perpetrators and hold them accountable before the courts. We welcome the good offices of the Secretary-General. We believe that all options must be considered in order to reach consensus on this issue.

Finally, we insist that the only way to resolve this conflict is through an inclusive political process of dialogue, led by and on behalf of the Syrian people within the framework of the Geneva process and resolution 2254 (2015), under the auspices of the United Nations. That means that we must continue to provide the necessary support for the efforts of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Syria and for the establishment of a constitutional committee.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Nakamitsu, for her valuable briefing earlier today.

We welcome the destruction of the last two chemical facilities in Syria. The overall number of chemical facilities that have been destroyed now stands at 27. This is a very important step towards the full implementation of resolution 2118 (2013). We also welcome the reference Ms. Nakamitsu made in her briefing to the signing of the Tripartite Agreement, which allows the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to resume the work and shoulder its responsibilities in Syria.

Despite the progress achieved, there remain discrepancies in the details of the chemical programme declared by the Syrian Government. We hope that the answers provided by the Syrian Government in response to the questions posed by the OPCW Director General will contribute to resolving those discrepancies. We call upon the relevant Syrian authorities to fully cooperate with the OPCW.

The Security Council is unable to fulfil its responsibilities pertaining to the Syrian chemical programme because it lacks a mechanism, replacing the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, to identify those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Syria. That is attributable to a division among Council members. As a result, many Member States, including Kuwait, have resorted to a different international platform, the OPCW, to fill that vacuum.

A special session of the Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Conventionwas held in The Hague, at which it was decided that the OPCW would take on the mandate of identifying the perpetrators of the crime of the use of chemical weapons. We look forward to the OPCW making the necessary arrangements in order to shoulder this responsibility. In that regard, we express our support for the Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic (FFM), and we commend its work and professionalism. We stress that it is important to cooperate with the FFM and to protect its staff so that they can work in a safe environment. We look forward to the final findings of the FFM soon, including the investigations of the Douma incident in April.

I reiterate the principled and steadfast position of the State of Kuwait in that regard. We condemn any use of chemical weapons anywhere, at any time and by any party. That is a flagrant violation of international law. We underscore the importance of holding those responsible for the use of chemical weapons to account, be they individuals, entities, non-State actors or Governments.

Our meeting today comes at a critical time, as we are seeing increasing reports and indications of an imminent military escalation in the Idlib governorate, home to nearly 3 million people, half of whom are internally displaced persons. We are particularly concerned about the possible recurrent use of chemical weapons in Syria, and about the repetition in Idlib of the crimes committed in Khan Shaykhun and elsewhere.

We join the Secretary-General in stressing that any use of chemical weapons is absolutely unacceptable. Over the past eight years, the Syrian people have suffered the most brutal humanitarian violations, including the use of chemical weapons against them. That is why we must be united and rise above our differences and divisions in order to prevent such

crimes against humanity and to peacefully resolve the situations in Idlib and in Syria as a whole. Our aim is to stop the bloodshed of our Syrian brethren.

In conclusion, we hope that the summit to be held tomorrow by the Astana guarantors will prevent a humanitarian disaster in Idlib, protect civilians and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to the needy, in compliance with the relevant Security Council resolutions and international humanitarian law.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for her excellent briefing on the issue of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

My delegation's statement will focus on the following two points: the progress made in implementing the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons, in accordance with resolution 2118 (2013), and the activities of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) regarding the allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

With regard to the Syrian chemical weapons programme, my delegation welcomes the progress made in destroying all of the 27 chemical weapons-production facilities. We believe that such progress is an important step towards the complete destruction of the country's chemical arsenal, and we therefore welcome the cooperation efforts of the Syrian Government. Further proof of this positive trend are the replies made by the Syrian Government to the non-exhaustive list of questions contained in the correspondence of the Director-General of the OPCW, dated 10 April. Those questions concern the initial declaration and the provision to the Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic of documents relating to the four incidents in which chemical weapons were allegedly used in 2017 in Khirbet Masasnah, Al-Salamiyah and Suran. Côte d'Ivoire hopes that the results of the analysis of those documents will allow us to shed light on those incidents and to identify, where appropriate, the perpetrators of the use of such chemical weapons so that they are held to account before the relevant international courts.

My country welcomes the new powers given to the OPCW, in accordance with the conclusions of the special session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention on 26 and 27 June, for the purpose of identifying the perpetrators of chemical weapons in Syria. In that regard, my delegation supports the decision of the OPCW Executive Council to take appropriate measures to identify the perpetrators of chemical weapons in Syria and to draft a report on all relevant information on the origin of those weapons. We also welcome the publication of the OPCW interim report on the allegations of chemical weapons use in Douma on 7 April, and we look forward to the conclusions of the final report.

In conclusion, my delegation calls on the parties to the conflict in Syria to focus on negotiations as part of an inclusive political dialogue, in accordance with the Geneva process, as mandated for in resolution 2254 (2015).

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs for her briefing and for all the work that she is doing on this issue with her team. Through her, allow me to thank the staff of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in The Hague.

Like other speakers, we remain deeply concerned about the escalating military action by the Syrian authorities and Russia in north-western Syria. This puts millions of civilians at risk, and the Security Council will discuss that tomorrow. But in that context, we are here today because we are seriously concerned by the potential for further illegal use of chemical weapons in any Syrian regime offensive in Idlib. As other speakers have done, we reiterate that the use of chemical weapons is a breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and that it constitutes a threat to international peace and security.

I was very interested in what the High Representative had to say about the review by the OPCW of the Syrian chemical weapons disclosure. I think that she is right to say that some important steps have been made in implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions, and that there are some very important outstanding issues. As of March, the OPCW Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic had confirmed 13 cases of likely chemical weapons use in Syria since it was established in 2014. In terms of allegations, the Fact-finding Mission has recorded at least 390. After more than four years of work by the Declaration Assessment Team, the OPCW is still unable to verify that the Syrian declaration is accurate. We have heard many times that there are "gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies" in Syria's account of its declaration under the CWC. Those are substantive points.

I do not think that the Council really understands why it is so difficult to resolve this issue. If a State Member of the United Nations were acting in good faith under the Chemical Weapons Convention, these issues would be capable of being resolved, but we still find ourselves confronting them in this Chamber, meeting after meeting. I would also like to state that the last report (see S/2018/745) noted that the list of issues had even increased rather than decreased, and I would like to know why. I hope that the Syrian representative will be able to give us an explanation for that today.

Turning to the risk of the use of chemical weapons over Idlib, and taking into account what the Russian representative said, Agatha Christie was a fiction writer. What is fact is that the Syrian authorities have been found to have used chemical weapons against their own people. What we hear from the Russian Ambassador is an inversion of the facts, an inversion of the concern for the protection of civilians that the Council has mandated, an inversion of what the rules-based international order of multilateralism is all about, and fundamentally, an inversion of what Governments are supposed to do as their first duty to protect their people and to keep their people safe. I just find it unconscionable, that after all these years, in the hundredth anniversary year of the end of the First World War, that any Government can even think of using chemical weapons against its own people or, indeed, against anyone else, whether they are a small city in Britain or a country like Syria.

I reject everything that the Russian Ambassador said about aggression on the part of three permament members of the Security Council. What France, the United Kingdom and the United States are aiming to do is to uphold the rules-based international order. People who worry about action by our three Governments should take every possible step to ensure that chemical weapons are not used, and then there will be no problem at all. We have demonstrated that we will respond swiftly and appropriately to any further use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime, which has already had such devastating humanitarian consequences for the Syrian population. Once again, I join others in urging Russia to use its influence to ensure that chemical weapons are not used against civilians in Syria. Either Russia calls for restraint or Russia will be deemed complicit in their use when these weapons are used.

I want to conclude, if I may, by saying that I could not agree more with the representative of Equatorial Guinea about the primacy of the political process, and I hope that those efforts can be redoubled over the coming weeks.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): As this is the first time this month that I am speaking at a meeting of the Security Council, allow me to congratulate your country, Madam President, on assuming the presidency of the Council for September. I also thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing.

As was confirmed in the report of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) (see S/2018/804), which was transmitted to the Security Council by Secretary-General Guterres, all 27 declared chemical weapons-production facilities in Syria have been destroyed. We also note that, as we speak, the OPCW is still studying the responses from the Syrian Government in relation to some of the outstanding questions concerning its initial chemical weapons declaration. We hope that the OPCW will continue to strengthen its communication and coordination with the Syrian Government in an effort to duly resolve the relevant issues.

The Chinese delegation notes some recent reports that hint at possible chemical weapons attacks within Syrian. I want to reiterate that China resolutely opposes the use of chemical weapons by any country, organization or individual in any circumstances or for any purpose, and advocates severe punishment of the perpetrators. At the same time, we believe that all alleged chemical weapons incidents must undergo comprehensive, objective and impartial investigations so as to ensure that they are based on conclusive evidence and that conclusions are in line with the facts and can stand the test of time. Until then, we should not predetermine the outcomes.

China consistently advocates respect for the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and opposes the wilful use or threat of use of force in international affairs. Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity must be fully respected.

The only way out of the Syrian impasse is through a political settlement. We hope that all parties concerned will, in a constructive spirit and through dialogue and consultation, seek solutions that preserve the unity of the Security Council and help to advance the political process in Syria.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): Let me begin by thanking Ms. Nakamitsu for her informative briefing.

I will focus on three points: first, the developments in Idlib; secondly, the use of chemical weapons; and thirdly, the need for attribution and accountability.

First, with regard to the developments in Idlib, as others before me have said, we are extremely concerned about the escalation of violence in Idlib due to recent air strikes. The risk of a further escalation of violence is deeply concerned. Such an escalation would lead to an unspeakable humanitarian catastrophe, with major regional consequences. The Council has the responsibility to prevent that worst-case scenario.

Let me repeat our key messages. All warring parties must abide by existing Security Council resolutions. A military offensive in Idlib would put at risk the lives of more than 3 million civilians living in the region and result in a new humanitarian catastrophe. The guarantors of the Idlib de-escalation zone and the Syrian regime need to work towards a peaceful, non-violent, negotiated solution for Idlib. Any measure to counter terrorism must comply with obligations under international law, in particular human rights law, international refugee law and international humanitarian law. Combating terrorism is no excuse to target without distinction or proportionality. Parties need to uphold international humanitarian law throughout Syria, and in particular in Idlib, and provide humanitarian access to those in need. Any use of chemical weapons is unacceptable, including in Idlib. It is prohibited by international law and would have devastating human and humanitarian consequences. We support the call of the Secretary-General for restraint in the use of force, with the protection of citizens as the first priority.

Secondly, with regard to chemical weapons, we thank the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for its fifty-ninth report (see S/2018/804). We support the objective and professional work of the OPCW Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic and call on all warring parties in Syria to continue their efforts to ensure that the Fact-finding Mission can continue its work independently. The Kingdom of the Netherlands looks forward to the final report on the attack in Douma on 7 April.

We condemn the recent trend of spreading deliberate disinformation on chemical weapons attacks, including in the Council, to create confusion. There is no credible information supporting the allegations of one Council member against the White Helmets and against Western countries. In our view, the Security Council should focus on common ground. We all condemn the use of chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone and under any circumstances; we all agree that impunity must be countered to defend the international non-proliferation architecture; and we all agree on the standard that the use of chemical weapons is never permitted. Together, we should reinforce the international norm that chemical weapons should never be used again.

My third point is about attribution and accountability. Let me refer to the points made by our Kuwaiti colleague on the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism and reiterate the importance of the outcome of the special session of the Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention on 27 June. There an overwhelming majority of States members of the OPCW reconfirmed and strengthened the standard against the use of chemical weapons.

We once again plead for follow-up to the conclusions of the OPCW Fact-finding Mission and its future attribution mechanism by referring the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. We remain convinced that the OPCW can make an important contribution to fighting impunity in Syria by sharing information with the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic.

In conclusion, the people of Syria have suffered far too long. They have suffered from mass atrocities, violence and the use of chemical weapons. Working with all possible instruments inside and outside the Council, the Kingdom of the Netherlands will continue its efforts to achieve accountability for those crimes.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I want first to thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs for her briefing.

During the conflict in Syria, we have witnessed numerous systematic and flagrant violations of international law, including violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, by all parties to the conflict andparticularly by Syrian forces. Chemical weapons have been used repeatedly. We condemn such use in the strongest terms. It is a serious violation of international law and constitutes a threat to international peace and security. Such use in armed

conflict amounts to a war crime. The proliferation and use of chemical weapons by State and non-State actors alike must end and those responsible for such crimes must be held accountable. Impunity is not and will not be an option.

We therefore supported the decision of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention at its special session to put in place arrangements to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. While a mechanism established by the Council would have been preferable, the issue was too important to be allowed to be blocked indefinitely. That does not, however, as has been stated in the Council previously, relieve the Council of its responsibility.

I want to make a few remarks with regard to the latest progress report (see S/2018/804) on the elimination of chemical weapons in Syria from the Director General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

First, we note that the Declaration Assessment Team is analysing the response of the Syrian authorities to the questions regarding the outstanding issues. Let me emphasize that all open issues must be closed without further delay. All remaining chemical weapons must be declared and destroyed, in line with resolution 2118 (2013). We urge the Syrian authorities to cooperate fully and actively with the OPCW so that the accuracy and completeness of its declaration can ultimately be verified.

Secondly, we would like to reiterate our full support for the OPCW and our complete confidence in the independent, impartial and professional work of its Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic. We look forward to the upcoming reports regarding a number of pending investigations, including the final report on the alleged attack in Douma.

Finally, we note the intention of the Director General to issue a second progress report, ahead of the October session of the OPCW Executive Council, on the implementation of the decision of the special session regarding attribution for chemical weapons attacks in Syria. We look forward to the Security Council being kept informed on that important matter.

We are alarmed by the signs of a possible military offensive in north-western Syria. Idlib is a de-escalation area, established by the Astana guarantors. However, one after the other of the de-escalation areas has turned into escalation areas. A full-scale military offensive would lead to a humanitarian catastrophe. Idlib is different from other areas. There is nowhere to flee. There are 3 million civilians living there, including 1 million children and internally displaced persons.

All parties, including Syrian allies, need to be reminded of their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians and civilian objects, and to comply with the principles of distinction, proportionality and avoidance of unnecessary suffering. We therefore urge all parties to abide by the de-escalation agreement in Idlib and the Astana guarantors to uphold their commitments regarding de-escalation and humanitarian access. We must ensure that Idlib will not become the next Aleppo or eastern Ghouta. It is vital that Russia, Turkey and Iran find a way during their meeting tomorrow to avoid further escalation. This Council also has a preventive role to avoid a disaster, and together with Kuwait and all other members of the Council, we stand ready to explore all meaningful options in that regard.

I express our alarm about allegations that chemical weapons may be used again and remind all parties of the clear and absolute prohibition on the use of chemical weapons under any circumstances. It is more critical than ever than we avoid escalation and revert to the track of diplomacy for a political solution, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). We reiterate our total support for the United Nations-led political process and the indefatigable efforts of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura. A sustainable political solution is the only way to end the suffering of the Syrian people after more than seven years of conflict.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United States.

I thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing.

History's verdict on the conflict in Syria is not yet written. There have been plenty of missteps, miscalculations and willful negligence throughout the course of the war. There has been evil, there has been honour and many things in between. I would say that it should be cause for deep shame on the part of those members of the Council that have fought relentlessly to shield the Al-Assad regime from accountability. Instead, those members have made a clear display of

their cynicism, their penchant for brutality and their lack of capacity for shame.

Still the competition for how the Syrian war will be remembered — as an example of humanity at its worst or at its best — goes on. Today's meeting is devoted to chemical weapons, but we should make no mistake — an Al-Assad regime offensive on Idlib would be a reckless escalation even if chemical weapons were not used. It is up to Russia to keep this from happening, and we will discuss the humanitarian consequences of the Idlib offensive in greater detail tomorrow. In the meantime, the Russian Federation has recently been building up its naval forces off the coast of Syria, signaling that Moscow is pre-positioning itself once again to abet the murder and mayhem of the Al-Assad regime. As on numerous occasions in the past, there are signs that the Assad regime is planning to use chemical weapons to finish off the siege of Idlib.

As in the past, the Syrian regime and its Russian and Iranian allies are spreading lies about who is behind chemical weapons attacks in Syria. Their claims are baseless. They are the definition of fake news. In fact, if the past is any guide, the Syrian and Russian attempts to blame others for the use of chemical agents are an indication that the Syrian regime still believes that it can use these horrific weapons with impunity, and an indication that the Syrian regime may be preparing to use these horrific weapons in future attacks. No one — I repeat — no one is fooled.

Here are the terrible facts of the war in Syria. Five years ago, the Al-Assad regime launched missiles containing a cocktail of deadly gas at the people of Ghouta, killing 1,429 people. On 4 April 2017, the Al-Assad regime dropped sarin gas from the sky on the people of Khan Shaykhun. The attack killed over 70 innocent Syrians, including dozens of children. An independent investigative group, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), found the Al-Assad regime responsible for the attack. The fact that the Russians later succeeded in killing the JIM does not change its conclusions. Their findings were credible and definitive. Al-Assad killed his own people with chemical weapons at Khan Shaykhun.

Then, in April 2018, over 40 people died and hundreds received treatment for exposure to chemical weapons in Douma. In all, the United States estimates, conservatively, that the Al-Assad regime has used chemical weapons on its own people at least 50 times since the war began. That amounts easily, conservatively, to 1,500 innocent children, women and men killed by the Syrian regime with chemical weapons — 1,500 murders covered up by the Russian regime and 1,500 reasons to disbelieve the claims that others are responsible for the atrocities.

As these ridiculous claims are repeated again and again, I ask everyone listening to remember that the Syrians' and Russians' lies do not exonerate them. The Syrians' and Russians' lies only reveal Al-Assad's guilt. The United States will not stop pushing back forcefully against these lies. We will not abandon the Syrian people.

Along with France, the United States has announced new sanctions against individuals and entities that support Al-Assad's chemical and conventional weapons programme. In June, the special sssion of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention decided that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons should identify the perpetrators of chemical attacks in Syria. Even though the United States believes that the primary responsibility for addressing the use of chemical weapons belongs to the Security Council, we welcome this decision. Anything that brings us closer to bringing the Al-Assad regime to account for its crimes enhances the security not just of the Syrian people but of us all.

In referencing accountability, we have a message for the Al-Assad regime and anyone contemplating using chemical weapons in Syria. In the past, 18 months I have spoken in this Chamber twice promising that the United States would respond to the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Both times, my Administration followed through. The United States and its allies forced the Al-Assad regime to pay the price for its crimes. We therefore want to take this opportunity to remind Al-Assad and his Russian and Iranian partners that they do not want to bet against the United States responding again.

The story of the war in Syria is still being written. There is still time for those who believe in human dignity to shape history. There is still time for the nations of the world to come to their aid. And there is still time for those who would commit additional acts of human savagery to reconsider their actions. The choice is theirs and it will dictate our response in the time and the manner of our choosing.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Some representatives have talked today about the existence of chemical weapons in Syria. Their talk is misleading and irresponsible because there are no longer any chemical weapons in Syria. There have been none since Ms. Sigrid Kaag announced before the Security Council in 2014 that there were no more chemical weapons in Syria

In her briefing today, Ms. Nakamitsu welcomed the destruction of all the 27 chemical weapon facilities in Syria, as well as the signing of the Tripartite Agreement, which allows the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) to continue its work in Syria. It would seem that this information has fallen on the deaf ears of certain colleagues who still insist in this Chamber on waiting for the arrival of someone named Godot who never arrives for decades, like in the absurdist play by Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*.

The threatening language used in the Security Council will have no impact, especially if it is coming from the presidency. We are diplomats and our task is to prevent wars and threats while searching for diplomatic solutions to international crises. That is our understanding as diplomats and as ambassadors. The Security Council is not a battleground. The Council has made several mistakes in Iraq and Libya, and it is about time to learn from our mistakes.

When my and other delegations first saw the programme of work for the month of September, we were convinced that certain permanent members did not want the Security Council to live up to its mandate of maintaining international peace and security; rather, those members are prepared to stop at nothing to exploit the Security Council and the working instruments of the United Nations to pursue their own political gains, to the detriment of maintaining international peace and security.

There are Governments of permanent members of the Security Council that have abdicated their responsibilities and become parties that are politically, morally and legally unqualified to defend international peace and security. To be clearer, I would say that any party that protects and covers up the Israeli nuclear, biological and chemical arsenal; uses pretexts to maintain its own chemical arsenals; destroyed Iraq by hiding behind the weapons-of-mass-destruction lie; withdrew from the international agreement with Iran; stopped funding United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees and withdrew from UNESCO; and continues to put pressure on United Nations funding while also threatening to withdraw from the World Trade Organization, has no right to launch forged and false accusations against my country, Syria, of using chemical weapons, especially if it has an historical record replete with established and non-fabricated facts about its own use of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons against civilians in many parts of the world.

Speaking of lies and fabrications, I would like to share with the Council the details of a comic and shameful television report that was prepared by a CNN reporter called Arwa Damon, who, in Turkey, met the self-styled victims of the alleged chemical attack in Douma in April. That alleged attack was used as a pretext by the American, British and French Governments, as Council members recall, for their tripartite aggression against Syria on Saturday, 14 April. Immediately following that aggression, there was a meeting of the Security Council (see S/PV.8233).

Going back to the television report in Turkey, hundreds of kilometres far from the site of the alleged incident that supposedly occurred in Douma, the CNN reporter met with the so-called victims just one week after the alleged attack. The reporter said that she smelled the strange and stinky odour of a chemical substance emanating from a school bag belonging to a child in Turkey to justify the military aggression against Syria. What a level of political and media decline!

Council members are aware of the fact that Syria and its allies are engaged in a ferocious battle against terrorist organizations, such as Da'esh, Al-Qaida and the Al-Nusra Front, as well as affiliated terrorist organizations. Members are explicitly and implicitly convinced that we do not need to use internationally prohibited weapons to eliminate terrorism. Members know for sure that we have waged war against international terrorism on behalf of their peoples and Governments. We will not yield to shameful political blackmail or to the threats of direct military aggression posed by the Governments of the United States, Britain and France. Those Governments have engaged in every kind of prohibited act in Syria, supported takfiri

terrorism and given orders to the terrorist Al-Nusra Front and its affiliated groups and organizations, in particular the White Helmets, to use chemical weapons against civilians in Syria in order to accuse the Syrian Government and find a pretext to launch a further military aggression.

We in Syria are fighting Al-Qaida on our territories, not in Washington, D.C., New York, London or Paris. We are fighting Al-Qaida itself, which was responsible for the aggression of 11 September 2001 in New York City. We are fighting Al-Qaida, which has attacked Paris, London and many European capitals. However, some members of the Council are rewarding us by supporting Al-Qaida against us, while we have been fighting Al-Qaida on their behalf and their peoples' behalf.

Those in this Chamber who are supposed to uphold international law and the legitimacy of the Charter should ask themselves why Syria would use an internationally prohibited weapon that we do not possess it and that does not yield a real military benefit. Why would we do that? It is simply being used as a pretext for the three aggressors to wage one aggression after another against us. Why is it that the chemical weapon allegedly used only impacts women and children and not terrorists? How are the Governments of the three aggressors able to predict the place, date and kind of chemical weapon that is going to be used in Syria? Why are these Governments are in sync with the terrorists of the Al-Nusra Front and the White Helmets regarding the predictability of the time and place of an attack? Why are the Security Council and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weappons (OPCW) unable to deal with the information provided by Syria?

In that regard, in recent years Syria has sent 156 official letters to the Security Council and the OPCW regarding the toxic chemical weapons that are possessed, stockpiled and prepared by terrorist armed groups in Syria to be used against civilians in order to accuse the Syrian army of using them. Nobody reads or wants to read those letters. Nobody wants to cooperate with the Syrian Government to combat terrorism and stop the terrorist groups from using chemical weapons. Why? Because some people are opposed to resolving the problem in Syria and want to invest in terrorism.

We have many questions to ask, and the answers are already known. Those three Governments have failed over the past eight years to achieve their goal in Syria by supporting terrorism. That is why those three Governments are carrying out their actions today openly and flagrantly. They are conducting direct military aggression against Syria and illegally deploying military forces in parts of my country. Those Governments are hindering the political process in Geneva, Astana and Sochi. They will try to prevent the eradication of terrorism in Idlib and other places, continue to impose a suffocating economic embargo on the Syrian people, block the funding of Syria's reconstruction and recovery, and prevent the repatriation of Syrian refugees and displaced persons so that they can live a dignified, safe and peaceful life.

I would like to underscore the fact that, following the destruction of the two last facilities, to which Ms. Nakamitsu referred earlier, and the dispatch of the OPCW Fact-find Mission to verify their destruction and clear the debris from the two sites, the Syrian Arab Republic has fulfilled all its obligations by destroying all sites related to the production of chemical weapons.

The Government of my country confirms that two days ago it sent an official letter to the members of the Security Council containing precise and highly credible information about preparations under way by terrorist groups in Idlib and in the suburbs of Latakia and Aleppo in connection with toxic chemical substances to be widely used against civilians, with a view to hampering the military operation against terrorism in those areas.

Lastly, it is all too clear and sad that certain permanent members of the Security Council, including the current presidency, have conflated the actual topic of today's meeting with that of tomorrow's meeting.

The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8345

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8345th meeting

Friday, 7 September 2018, 9.30 a.m.
New York

President:	Mrs. Haley	(United States of America)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Al Jarallah
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 9.35 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Mr. John Ging, Director of Operations and Advocacy in the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Mr. De Mistura is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Geneva.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I welcome Mr. De Mistura to the meeting and now give him the floor.

Mr. De Mistura: I thank you, Madam President, for this opportunity to address the Security Council. We believe that the timing is very appropriate, in particular because the focus is on Idlib. We have been hearing about it over the past few days. We are all terribly concerned because all of the elements exist for a perfect storm, with potentially devastating humanitarian and other consequences. First of all, let me provide a summary of the facts. I am sure that John Ging will be able to refer to some of the humanitarian aspects.

The best available and independent assessment of the United Nations estimates that there are at least 2.9 million people in Idlib. I repeat 2.9 million people — almost 3 million, in fact. Among them are 1 million children, and 1.4 million people who have already been displaced at least once. Terrorist groups on the Security Council's list are also present, including non-Syrians, foreign fighters and those who have committed terrible acts in many other places. There are also armed opposition groups, many of whom have been evacuated to Idlib through reconciliation agreements and are not members of terrorist groups. An overwhelming number of people in Idlib — 98.5 per cent — are civilians.

President Al-Assad has stated that restoring sovereignty and defeating terrorists remain the priority of the Syrian Government. Senior Government officials have also stated that retaking Idlib is the next goal. Senior Iranian and Russian officials have spoken in strong terms about their own determination to purge terrorists from Idlib. At the same time, they have indicated that, first, the Government would prefer so-called reconciliation agreements rather than military action; secondly, Russian-Turkish understanding is crucial; and, thirdly, Syria does not want a confrontation with Turkey. Those are recent statements made by Syrian Government officials.

Russia has been engaged in intense dialogue with Turkey in particular and, as the Council knows, all eyes are on what could transpire, or has transpired, following the summit meeting of the Presidents of Iran, Russia and Turkey, which just concluded in Tehran. Meanwhile, reports suggest increased deployments of Government and affiliated forces and equipment near the Idlib de-escalation zone — yes, that used to be, and still is officially, a de-escalation zone. Air strikes and mutual artillery shelling have been reported on its perimeter for the past months, resulting in deaths and injuries on both sides, with an intensification since 4 September.

Meanwhile, the leader of what they call the Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham — basically the Al-Nusra Front, and let us call them by name — has publicly signalled the group's intention to fight. On 2 September, photos of weaponized drones were circulated online after landing in the Al-Ghab plain. Ostensibly, the same models of Russian Federation planes were used to carry out several attacks on the Khmeimim air base in recent months.

For their part, armed opposition groups in Idlib have reportedly been fortifying their own positions, digging tunnels and trenches and detonating bridges. Many of those armed opposition groups — that are not terrorist groups — have pleaded publicly for the Astana guarantors to secure a non-military solution. Since early August, almost every single armed opposition group in Idlib has now come under the banner of what is called the "national liberation front". That includes various groups that have been operating under the same banner as the Al-Nusra Front in the past. If that is confirmed, which is what we seem to be hearing,

that can be taken as a sign of their own willingness to separate from Al-Nusra. We hope that they will now take even further steps to separate themselves from listed terrorist groups. I note in that context that, at the end of August, Turkey made it clear that it views Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham — the Al-Nusra Front — as a terrorist organization, thereby sending a strong signal to armed groups to separate from Al-Nusra from now on. With statements and counter-statements regarding potential chemical-weapons use, we have warnings and counter-warnings about the dangers of a major assault on Idlib, and we have seen an intensified military presence in the region.

I have laid out to the members of the Security Council all of the ingredients for a perfect storm. The dangers are profound, in that any battle for Idlib would be a horrific and bloody battle. Civilians are its potential victims, and there are ever-present dangers in the case of a full-scale assault of incidents or rapid escalations involving regional and international players. Let us remember that there is no Idlib after Idlib to which people can be evacuated, or at least feel safer in during a battle. There must another way than an all-out military escalation. The Security Council cannot accept that the civilians of Idlib must meet that type of fate.

Efforts to combat terrorism do not supersede obligations under international law and the moral conscience of humankind. We must put the sanctity of civilian human life above everything else. That is why we are urging ourselves and all stakeholders to contribute to finding a formula to prevent a terrible tragedy, while at the same allowing the issue of Security Council-designated terrorist groups to be addressed.

The declaration issued by Presidents Putin, Erdoğan and Rouhani states that they have decided to address the situation in Idlib "in the spirit of cooperation that characterized the Astana format". We do not have many more details on that. We would like to see what that means in practice in order to address the issue. They are the guarantors of the last de-escalation area, and therefore have direct influence — and, frankly, responsibility — on how to solve it. I am sure Idlib is at the top of their agenda, as was shown in the Tehran meeting.

I look also to other key actors, including Gulf and many other countries, that have leverage over non-terrorist armed opposition groups to do whatever they can to ensure that they put civilians first and separate from Al-Nusra. I am concerned about reports that many groups — although not all — have become increasingly desperate, and in some cases ruthless.

My colleague John Ging, from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, will brief members of the Council on what must happen on the humanitarian side to protect civilians and on the humanitarian response plan. But let me emphasize that people should be granted safe passage to places of their own choosing, if they want to leave temporarily. We must allow the opening of a sufficient number of protected voluntary evacuation routes for civilians in any direction — east, north and south. For that, the United Nations must be granted access to scale. The United Nations stands ready, including myself and surely all of my colleagues of the humanitarian team, to work with all parties on the spot and elsewhere on the modalities and parameters for establishing a functioning evacuation route, if it were required, with full respect for international humanitarian law and human rights principles.

Let me further reiterate the Secretary-General's clear position that any use of chemical weapons is totally and completely unacceptable. As the Organization on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has found, the norm against the use of chemicals weapons has been repeatedly violated in Syria. That must not happen again. I cannot stress enough the danger associated with any alleged use of those weapons, not only in humanitarian terms but also when it comes to the acute threat to maintaining international peace and security. I equally strongly underscore that the overwhelming majority of civilians killed in Syria have been victims of indiscriminate, or sometimes targeted, attacks against them using conventional weapons. Such attacks re also abhorrent and unacceptable.

All the talk of an assault that could produce a perfect storm in Idlib is happening at exactly the same time as serious talk about moving forward on a constitutional committee and about desires to urge Syrian refugees to return to their country. Those narratives do not square well with *each other. Either we are trying to find a* political way to end the war and move to a post-war political scenario, or we will see the war reach new levels of horror. That is why today's meeting in Tehran is so important, and why I am convening Iran, Russia and Turkey in Geneva on Monday and Tuesday, and Egypt, France, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and the United States on Friday. It

will be the ultimate failure of the imagination and an end of diplomacy if with those efforts we simply see an increase in military activity.

Let me conclude with two points.

I have seen many people — civilians — from Idlib today, including women, noble doctors, farmers and people of all kinds, approximating almost 3 million. They have held peaceful demonstrations and lighted candles at night to show that normal people live in each of the houses, not necessarily terrorists. They make up 3 million civilians. I have been inspired by what they have been telling me. They have been asking us — the United Nations, through the Council — to also express our voices. In that context, since we are addressing the question of separating terrorists from others, protecting civilians and giving a voice to civilians, and as I have been asked if we the United Nations have any ideas, I would like to share that we do have some ideas, and I will take the liberty of elaborating on them when we meet in private. Any idea or proposal to avoid this situation from becoming the biggest humanitarian tragedy at the end of the most horrible conflict in recent memory should at least be given a chance.

The President: I thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing.

During this presidency, we are holding all meetings in the open. We want to hear from Mr. De Mistura what the civilians have to say and what they think. We would appreciate it if he would say that publicly and let us know what he thinks. If he has any additional comments after we are done, we are more than happy to hear those, if he is comfortable with that being public.

I once again give the floor to Mr. De Mistura.

Mr. De Mistura: Based on your authorization and your request, Madam President, I have no problem in doing so. In fact, all of our proposals are, and should be, public. I will gladly present that information. I only ask to truly be given a chance to do so. I would not like to miss the chance to actually make a proposal and then see whether anyone else has other proposals. I will be happy as long as we do not simply stop at saying that this is a horrible thing and that we hope it does not happen.

The President: We thoroughly agree and we appreciate Mr. De Mistura's service.

I now give the floor to Mr. Ging.

Mr. Ging: Last week, during the monthly briefing on the humanitarian situation in Syria (see S/PV.8322), I briefed the Security Council recent developments in Idlib, our current response, the planning under way and preparations should the situation escalate further. Today I will provide an additional update on the situation and on the humanitarian response.

As the Special Envoy stated, of the nearly 3 million people living in the Idlib de-escalation zone — which includes parts of Idlib, Aleppo, Latakia, and Hama governorates — 2.1 million are in need of humanitarian assistance, including 1.4 million people who are internally displaced. While our humanitarian response currently focuses on supporting the 2.1 million people in need, we are concerned for the protection and safety of all civilians living in the area should the hostilities intensify.

On 4 September, renewed air and ground-based strikes in western and southern rural Idlib, as well as northern rural Hama, led to civilian casualties and displacement. Heavy bombardment of the Jisr al-Shughour area of western rural Idlib led to some 13 civilian deaths, including at least four children, injuring another 20 civilians. On 6 September, a hospital near Kafr Zita, in northern Hama, was reportedly hit by an air strike, despite the fact that it had been deconflicted. We also continue to receive reports of improvised explosive devices and other attacks killing and maiming civilians in populated areas throughout Idlib, including humanitarian aid workers. At least three doctors were killed in August alone.

As a result of the insecurity, schools in western Idlib around Jisr al-Shughour and surrounding communities have been suspended. Key crossing points between Government- and opposition-controlled areas are also reportedly closed, some by the destruction of bridges by non-State armed opposition groups. In addition to restricting freedom of movement for the population, that has also contributed to rising food prices and shortages.

At the request of humanitarian organizations, the United Nations has provided deconfliction information for 125 humanitarian sites in Idlib to the military actors. That information was submitted to facilitate the parties' identification of humanitarian facilities, warehouses, offices and sites where humanitarian assistance is being provided to people in need. In their military operations, all parties bear the obligation to take constant care to spare civilians and civilian objects,

including humanitarian workers and humanitarian facilities. Any deconflicted sites that are reported to have been targeted must be immediately investigated.

The United Nations and non-governmental organizations continue to implement a major humanitarian operation throughout Idlib, with an average of 2 million people reached every month with cross-border assistance from Turkey.

Beyond the provision of assistance, efforts are ongoing to ensure that people in need can be supported in the event of an increase in hostilities. Our teams in Damascus and Gaziantep have together developed a readiness plan that sets out a coordinated, flexible response for the affected population in the coming period. Plans are in place to support up to 900,000 women, children and men who could be affected by conflict, including for up to 700,000 people who may be displaced within Idlib and beyond due to potential hostilities. We also estimate that up to 100,000 people may cross into Government-controlled areas. In addition, if the conflict spreads to the Tal Rifaat area, we estimate that another 100,000 people may seek to move towards other areas in Aleppo governorate or to north-east Syria.

Humanitarian aid is already being positioned inside Idlib, as well as in surrounding areas in Aleppo, Latakia and Hama. That includes ready-to-eat food rations sufficient for one week to cover as many as 850,000 people — both through cross-border operations via Turkey and from inside Syria. Additionally, non-food items, shelter, water, sanitation, hygiene and medical supplies are also being positioned. The World Health Organization has dispatched more than 25 tons of supplies to Aleppo in the past month alone.

The United Nations has released $20 million from the Tureky humanitarian fund. Approximately $10 million of that allocation is focused on ensuring shelter, and non-food items will be available should an increase in violence force people to be displaced. While some donors, including the United Kingdom and Germany, have recently provided additional resources, for which we are most grateful, the amount received falls woefully short of the $311 million that we estimate is required if there is an increase in violence resulting in mass displacement. Simply put, that is funding that we do not currently have, as multiple crises over the past period, in eastern Ghouta, Afrin, southern Syria and Idlib earlier this year, have strained our already limited pool of resources.

Civilians in the de-escalation zone have borne the impact of fighting throughout the years of the Syria conflict. Vulnerable populations have displaced to the area from eastern Aleppo, eastern Ghouta, northern rural Homs and southern Syria. Communities and humanitarian responders have been stretched to their limits to support those who arrive, often with nothing. The humanitarian impact on civilians of any increase in fighting will therefore be most severe. And the worst-case scenario in Idlib, where millions would flee fighting, will overwhelm all capacity to respond regardless of plans or funding made available. It has the potential to create a humanitarian emergency at a scale not yet seen during the crisis.

In conclusion, let me highlight five key asks to the Council, and through it to all parties to the conflict and those who have influence over them.

First, there must be a cessation of hostilities in the area and, at a minimum, we must ensure that there is no escalation. Secondly, we must ensure the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure, including humanitarian and medical personnel and assets, in compliance with the parties' obligations under international humanitarian law. Thirdly, we must respect and enable freedom of movement for people who wish to move in any direction. Additionally, civilians who choose to stay must be allowed to do so and must remain protected. Fourthly, we must allow and facilitate safe, rapid, unhindered and sustained humanitarian access to the people in need through the most direct routes, including to areas that have changed control. Fifthly, there must be increased funding for priority response and readiness activities, given that the humanitarian response is already overstretched.

The President: I thank Mr. Ging for his briefing and important remarks.

I would like to remind the Council that after Council members speak, if they have any questions or comments for Mr. De Mistura, we are going to bring him back after the Council members have spoken and before the representative of Syria speaks.

Mr. Al Jarallah (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, for his valuable briefing and his efforts in the

Syrian political process. I would also like to thank the Director of Operations and Advocacy in the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Mr. John Ging, for his briefing. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the efforts of all humanitarian workers in Syria.

I deliver this statement on behalf of the co-penholders on the humanitarian situation in Syria, namely, the State of Kuwait and the Kingdom of Sweden.

Today's meeting of the Security Council is taking place at a very critical time. Indications and reports of a possible imminent military escalation in Idlib province are increasing. The international community is concerned, and international aid agencies are preparing themselves hastily. The situation in Idlib is different from those of Aleppo, eastern Ghouta and Dara'a. Idlib is home to nearly 3 million people — half of them internally displaced. Were military operations to begin there, it would be disastrous. The humanitarian consequences will be dire for the inhabitants if no arrangements are reached between the parties concerned. Were such an escalation to occur, where would those innocent civilians go to avoid artillery and air bombardments? We now know that there is no safe place in which they could seek refuge.

We urge all the relevant parties to abide by the de-escalation agreement in Idlib, in the hope that we will not again a de-escalation zone turned into an escalation area. We also echo the appeal of Secretary-General António Guterres to the Government of Syria and all the parties concerned to exercise restraint, as well as his call on the Astana guarantors to step up efforts to find a peaceful solution to the situation in Idlib. In that regard, we note today's summit of the Astana guarantors; we expect them to respect their own de-escalation agreement in Idlib and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

We stress the importance of giving diplomatic efforts more time and attention, including redoubling of efforts by all to avoid further bloodshed. The images of death and destruction from Aleppo and eastern Ghouta remain in our memory. The Syrian people have suffered enough over the past eight years, and have been exposed to flagrant violations of humanitarian law and international human rights law while the perpetrators of those crimes have not been held accountable.

Military attacks against Council-designated terrorist groups in no way absolve any party to the conflict from its obligations under international law, including complying with the principles of distinction, proportionality, precaution and protection of civilians and civilian targets. Even wars have rules that must be observed. Let us remember that it is innocent civilians — children, women and the elderly — who make up the vast majority of the population in Idlib, not terrorists.

We commend the efforts undertaken by OCHA and its partners to stockpile humanitarian supplies in preparation for the expected disaster in Idlib. We urge donors to step up their contributions to the humanitarian response and call on all parties to allow and facilitate rapid, safe and sustained humanitarian access to those in need. In that context, cross-border assistance is a vital part of the humanitarian response in Syria. Millions of Syrians depend upon such assistance, including nearly 2 million people in Idlib and the neighbouring areas. There is no doubt that the number of those in need will increase in the event of any comprehensive military operation there.

The increasing indications and reports coming in are a matter of concern, and we remind all parties of their responsibilities under international humanitarian law to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. The systematic attacks against civilian areas, including schools, hospitals and medical facilities in Idlib province and beyond, must cease immediately. Humanitarian and medical personnel must be protected in line with international humanitarian law. In that regard, we reaffirm the need to respect Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2401 (2018), which was submitted by the State of Kuwait and the Kingdom of Sweden in February and which calls for a ceasefire without delay, as well as the delivery of humanitarian aid. We must also respect resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of hospitals and medical personnel, and resolution 2427 (2018), on children and armed conflict.

Resolutions that are not implemented on the ground have no value. We underscore the need for accountability and no impunity. We renew our support for the International Independent Commission of Inquiry and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011.

The Security Council has a humanitarian, moral and legal responsibility to the population of Idlib, and the Council must seek meaningful preventative measures. The series of meetings of the Council on Syria in general, and specifically on Idlib this week, including our meeting today, are critical to that end. We appreciate and support the efforts of Mr. Staffan de Mistura in Idlib and throughout Syria. We reaffirm that the best way to reach a sustainable solution to the Syrian crisis and avoid humanitarian catastrophe, particularly in Idlib, remains a political solution under the auspices of the United Nations, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

In conclusion, the State of Kuwait and the Kingdom of Sweden will do their utmost to push the Security Council towards exploring all meaningful options and to ensure that the Council closely follows the developments in Idlib. As co-penholders and significant donors to the humanitarian response in Syria, we will continue to play our role to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people and to ensure that the Security Council upholds its responsibilities in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the United States presidency for convening this meeting, which comes at a critical moment and allows us to reiterate collectively our serious concerns about the situation in Idlib. I also thank Mr. John Ging and Mr. Staffan de Mistura for their very enlightening briefings and commitment and that of their teams.

Let us go straight to the facts. Syria is once again on the verge of abyss, as the Idlib area has become a humanitarian, migration and security time bomb. That is the three-alarm fire that we would face in the event of a massive military offensive on the part of the regime. The risk is considerable and clearly defined. In recent history, few disasters have been as clearly anticipated and been the subject of as many convergent warnings by the international community. As the moment of truth approaches, those repeated warnings, made through all means available, must be fully grasped by the stakeholders. That is the very purpose of today's meeting and there is not a minute to lose.

As we speak, a large-scale military offensive by the regime, supported by its allies, appears to be imminent in Idlib, where hundreds of thousands of Syrians have taken refuge throughout the conflict. As John Ging and Staffan de Mistura reminded us, Idlib counts almost 3 million inhabitants. More than half of them have already been displaced from other parts of Syria. In that context, a large-scale military offensive would create a new humanitarian disaster, given that those civilians have nowhere else to go. We are now only all too familiar with how such offensives repeatedly play out, entailing large-scale violations of international humanitarian law with deliberate, deadly attacks on civilians, indiscriminate air raids and the risk of the renewed use of chemical weapons by the regime. Such an offensive would also lead to a major migration crisis for northern Syria, Turkey, and potentially Europe and even other parts of the world. Such an offensive would also pose a serious threat to regional security with the spillover of jihadist fighters there. Lastly, a large-scale military operation would have repercussions in Europe and even beyond.

Given the gravity of the situation and the stakes, we call on the Astana guarantors, who are meeting today in Tehran and have the means at their disposal to stop events from spiralling out of control — especially Syria, Russia and Iran — to shoulder their responsibilities and commit to three imperatives: to respect the ceasefire, of which they are the guarantors; to guarantee full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access throughout Syria, while protecting civilians; and to make way for a process leading to a credible political solution to the Syrian crisis. Respect for the ceasefire is the only viable path.

Let us make no mistake — the goal is to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe and not merely to manage it as best as we can. Those supporting the Syrian regime have the means to prevent such a crisis, as the regime does not have the ability to act alone. A new massacre would therefore be the responsibility and the failure of the regime's supporters. Conversely, they can still halt the escalation and show the world that they have paved the way for a peaceful settlement. There is still time to avoid disaster in Idlib, but once again there is not a minute to spare. That is why we call on Russia and Iran to ensure the maintenance of the Idlib region as the last de-escalation zone, to protect civilians and to respect and enforce full respect for international humanitarian law there.

I welcome the steps taken by the United Nations to prevent escalation and its significant efforts to help the civilian population, as John Ging mentioned earlier. I

also welcome Turkey's efforts to that end. For its part, France has been fully engaged, in particular alongside Presidents Erdoğan and Putin, to avoid any offensive and to relaunch the political process. At the same time, we must do everything possible to ensure safe, full and unhindered humanitarian access and the protection of civilians, civilian infrastructure and humanitarian personnel. We commend the difficult work of the United Nations on the ground and encourage Mark Lowcock, his team and John Ging to persevere in their requests to the Syrian authorities.

I also recall the crucial nature of aid provided by cross-border convoys, authorized by resolution 2393 (2017). Assistance via Turkey facilitates the daily delivery of vital support to almost 2 million people in the north-west. It is therefore our responsibility to help maintain and strengthen cross-border aid. France will maintain and adapt its assistance accordingly to north-western Syria.

We must be extremely vigilant with regard to exploiting the issue of humanitarian corridors. The forced displacement of thousands of people to areas under the regime's control in the total absence of international supervision would in no way be humanitarian, but would rather amount to war crimes. Priority should continue to be placed on the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Lastly, as our highest-level political authorities have stressed on more than one occasion, I reaffirm in the strongest terms that we will exercise the utmost vigilance concerning any verified renewed use of chemical weapons by the regime and our full resolve to take action in any such situation, alongside the United Kingdom and the United States, as we have stated previously.

Concerning the fight against the terrorist threat, in which France is on the front line, it can in no way justify what we have witnessed in Syria. When the struggle against terrorism is used to justify indiscriminate attacks on civilians and serious violations of international humanitarian law, it becomes merely a pretext whose effect — and perhaps goal — only fuels the terrorism that it asserts to combat.

Everyone here must carefully consider the fact that a massacre in Idlib would undermine the efforts undertaken to reach a political solution. We must therefore strive for a sustainable, inclusive and credible political solution, pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015), which the Council adopted by consensus. In the immediate term, we must support the establishment of a constitutional committee with the help of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, whom I thank once again. Such a committee must meet as soon as possible and carry out its work in a completely independent manner under the auspices of the United Nations, which is the very prerequisite for its credibility. We all know that this is just one step, and it will be essential to quickly address the issue of the holding of free and fair elections, open to all Syrians, including refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as the creation of a neutral environment conducive to the restoration of trust and the implementation substantive reforms. Those will be essential steps, and that is the only way to avoid the prolongation of the crisis *ad vitam æternam*.

In conclusion, I stress that a deadly offensive in Idlib would mark not the end of the Syrian crisis, as certain experts in the art of confusion would have us believe, but rather the beginning of a new phase in the protracted Syrian tragedy, which would be characterized by radicalization, instability, an endless cycle of the same causes and effects, the entrenchment of terrorism and a possible geographic spread of the conflict. Beyond the looming humanitarian disaster, that is what is at stake in Idlib.

Our collective responsibility is to look to the future. The European Union and several partners have clearly reiterated that they can assist in rebuilding Syria only when an irreversible, credible and inclusive political transition is indeed under way. There will be no blank cheque for Syria or a massive return of refugees without confidence-building measures that guarantee a secure environment. Contrary to what the regime and its allies would have us believe, it is clear that it is not the lack of rebuilding that prevents the return of refugees, but rather the lack of credible progress in the political process.

We are therefore at a crossroads. France again calls on the Astana guarantors to respect the ceasefire because an escalation of violence is in no one's interest and, as we speak, could even be avoided. That alone will enable us to move towards an inclusive political solution. It is in our best interest and above all that of the Syrian people. On behalf of France and in support of the Geneva process, I invite us all to forge ahead towards a political solution that is within reach if we unite our efforts and overcome all difficulties.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation welcomes the convening of today's meeting and thanks Special Envoy for Syria Staffan De Mistura and Director John Ging for their enlightening and objective briefings. We reiterate Equatorial Guinea's support for their noble efforts in an extremely difficult environment.

I will focus my statement in particular on the ongoing military rumblings in Idlib, on the serious humanitarian situation in the province, and, lastly, on the importance of not obstructing the political process to bring about lasting peace in Syria.

Equatorial Guinea is deeply concerned about the situation in the Syrian province of Idlib and the possible catastrophic humanitarian consequences in the event of a large-scale military offensive. The war in Syria, which has been ravaging the country since 2011, has reached its climax. According to reports, reports of Government troops near Idlib suggest an imminent escalation of violence in the area. It should be recalled that Idlib, the last terrorist enclave, controlled by and large by the terrorist group Tahrir Al-Sham, also known as the Al-Nusra Front, as well as by armed opposition groups, is part of the de-escalation zone in northern Syria, sponsored by the Astana guarantors.

The United Nations estimates that there are almost 3 million people in that de-escalation zone, including nearly 1.4 million internally displaced persons and 2.1 million people in need of humanitarian assistance. In line with the Secretary-General's communiqué of 29 August, we urgently call on all parties to exercise restraint and prioritize the protection of civilians. We further encourage all parties to take all measures necessary to safeguard civilian life, allow freedom of movement and ensure the protection of civilian infrastructure, including medical and educational facilities, in keeping with international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

The international community must avoid any military imbroglio in Idlib at all costs. If it does not, in future meetings of the Council we will be forced to discuss its direct and deleterious consequences, such as the possible use of chemical substances as weapons of war against civilians and, according to United Nations estimates, the approximately 1 million displaced people and more than $300 million needed to respond to the imminent humanitarian catastrophe.

On the political front, we reiterate our firm commitment to an inclusive political process, under the auspices of the United Nations, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). We hope that the tripartite summit, held today in Tehran among the Astana guarantors — the Russian Federation, Iran and Turkey — as well as the upcoming meetings of the Special Envoy on 10 and 11 September, will lead to consensus-based actions for the establishment of a truly representative constitutional committee, thereby paving the way for a definitive settlement to the conflict. We agree with the Special Envoy, who recently stated that it is necessary to maintain moral pressure on the warring parties so as to prevent a drastic military offensive and allow more time for a sustainable solution that can combat terrorism and save civilians.

We understand that in an increasingly multipolar world, the balance among Powers no longer depends solely on their economic capabilities, but also on their military capabilities. The allies of the parties involved in this politico-military labyrinth must seek another mechanism or scenario to test their military might. It is inconceivable to continue sacrificing the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people to live in peace, stability and lasting progress at the altar of economic and geostrategic interests. For eight years, millions of innocent people have suffered direct consequences of the war and its collateral damage, which is both devastating and horrific.

Idlib cannot be compared to any other region. The city is home not only to the fighters who settled there with their families, following their evacuation from Aleppo, eastern Ghouta, Dar'a and Quneitra, under the co-called reconciliation agreement, but also to civilians who have nothing to do with the war and have simply sought refuge there. Hundreds of thousands of people took refuge in Idlib because they were told they would be safe there. Russia, Turkey and Iran had decreed it to be a de-escalation zone, but today the warring parties have taken those people hostage. Equatorial Guinea calls on Russia, Turkey and Iran, as well as the United States and Western and Gulf countries with influence in the area, to do their utmost to ensure that those with weapons and power will , for the first time in this war, make civilians their top priority.

I conclude by citing Mr. Jan Egeland, head of the United Nations humanitarian task force on Syria, who spoke recently of the intense ongoing political and humanitarian negotiation on Syria. He said:

"If it succeeds we will have hundreds of thousands of lives spared, if it fails in the next days and hours we could see a battle more cruel than any previous battle in the cruelest war of our generation".

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): We are grateful to the presidency for convening today's meeting on the deteriorating humanitarian and security situation in Idlib. Allow me to thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura and Mr. John Ging for their informative briefings.

The conflict raging in Syria and the resulting violence and violations of international law, including human rights law, have brought suffering to the civilian population of Syria at a scale that is unique in today's world. We are concerned about the possible intensification of hostilities in Idlib. Once again, we stress that there is no military solution to the conflict and that any attempt to bring about peace by force would be counterproductive to an inclusive and credible political process, under the auspices of the United Nations.

In the context of the current situation in Idlib, let me reiterate Poland's position.

First, we call on the Astana guarantors and other actors with influence on the ground to live up to their commitments and to take all actions necessary to protect the civilian population of Idlib. Secondly, we stress again the need to secure full and unhindered humanitarian access to Syria, including Idlib, and to take all measures necessary to enhance the protection of humanitarian workers. Thirdly, refugees must be given an opportunity for a safe, free and dignified return to their homes. A major military operation in Idlib governorate may hinder that goal and consequently create a new wave of refugees. The Idlib governorate, having the highest number of internally displaced persons in all of Syria, requires our special, cautious approach.

Our particular concern is that we are witnessing the destruction of Syria's crucial civilian infrastructure, including medical and educational facilities. Such destruction must stop immediately, in accordarce with international humanitarian law and human rights law. Intense bombardments and the shelling of schools and hospitals in Idlib and other governorates not only have *an immediate and catastrophic impact* on the living conditions of civilians, but also significantly diminish future efforts to bring about reconciliation in Syria and to commence Syria's major reconstruction.

Poland is particularly concerned over the fate of the most vulnerable victims of conflict: children, women and members of religious minorities. We are alarmed by the situation of children affected by the conflict, especially in Idlib. Many children have been forced to leave their homes in other parts of Syria, seeking safe refuge in Idlib governorate, although they also face the risk of violence, displacement and loss of family members. The escalation of military activities would result in a major humanitarian tragedy, with children falling victim once again.

At the same time, Poland strongly advocates women's participation and empowerment in all aspects of the process of finding a solution for the conflict in Syria. While many men have been killed, imprisoned or forced to leave their homes for war, women are faced with the task of caring for their families in dire circumstances in a display of heroism, perseverance and resilience.

Let me conclude by emphasizing our concern about the possibility of another chemical attack in Syria. The use of chemical weapons is not only a horrifying act of barbarism, but also an illegal act that could have devastating consequences for the civilian population. The perpetrators of such crimes must be aware that the international community will do its best to bring them to justice.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of this meeting and the important briefings by Mr. Staffan de Mistura and Mr. John Ging. We also appreciate their tireless efforts and those of their teams.

Peru observes with deep regret and concern the continuation of the conflict in Syria. We note with alarm the prospect of a new escalation of violence in the town of Idlib and the devastating humanitarian consequences that it would bring. The levels of violence and suffering registered in Aleppo and eastern Ghouta, among other locations of the protracted conflict, prompt us to underline the responsibility of the Council to protect some 3 million people in Idlib, including more than 1 million children. In a few days, we could be talking about tens of thousands of new fatalities and some 700,000 newly displaced persons, according to United Nations estimates. That does not include the wounded and the destruction of civilian infrastructure.

We must also anticipate the serious repercussions that a new display of barbarism would have on the

peace process that, with the support of the Council, is being promoted by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General. That could lead to the further destabilization of the Middle East and to new tensions among the permanent members of the Council, which have a special responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

In that context, we emphasize the applicability of the principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. We also recall that resolution 2401 (2018), which must be enforced and implemented, calls for a ceasefire on all Syrian territory. The Council, and especially the countries with influence on the ground, must act to ensure that the parties to the conflict abandon the military track and the contempt they have shown for international law and international humanitarian law by acting with impunity.

Peru emphatically condemns terrorism and believes that terrorist groups that remain in Idlib and other parts of Syrian territory must be held accountable before the courts for the crimes they have committed. But we emphasize that in no case does that justify further massacres of civilians. In that regard, we highlight the spirit of unity and commitment expressed on Wednesday by the 10 elected members of the Council in conveying a message of concern that emphasizes the urgent need to prioritize the protection of civilians in Idlib.

We hope that the Astana guarantors, meeting today in Tehran, will be able to agree on a formula to prevent the tragedy looming over the civilian population of Idlib, and on that basis support the political process based on resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

Dag Hammarskjöld, alluding to the horrors of the Second World War, famously stated that the Organization was "not created in order to bring us to heaven, but in order to save us from hell" (*SG/382, p.7*). A few months ago, however, Secretary-General António Guterres described eastern Ghouta as "hell on earth" (*S/PV.8185, p. 2*). We believe that it is time for the Council to act with unity and commitment to prevent Idlib from becoming a new scene of horror and suffering.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation would like to thank the American presidency of the Council for organizing this meeting on the latest developments in Syria and, more particularly, in Idlib governorate. We also thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura and Mr. John Ging for their excellent briefings.

Reports of the imminent large-scale and intense fighting between belligerents in Idlib governorate are a source of great concern for my country, inter alia, because of the risk of exacerbating the already dire humanitarian situation. Indeed, of the approximate 3 million inhabitants of Idlib governorate, 2 million — or two-thirds — face pressing humanitarian needs. In addition, according to the estimates of the United Nations and humanitarian agencies, the resumption of fighting in Idlib governorate would cause a massive displacement of between 450,000 and 750,000 people.

The certain humanitarian disaster that would result from the escalation of fighting is compounded by the risk of the possible use of chemical weapons by the belligerents. That tragic and alarming event, in my delegation's view, would once again constitute a breach of international law on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and undermine the international legal mechanisms in the area of non-proliferation.

That is why Côte d'Ivoire wishes to reaffirm its principled position that there is no alternative to the search for peace through a frank and inclusive dialogue in Syria. We therefore condemn any use of force as a means of conflict resolution and urge all Syrian parties to prioritize political dialogue, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), which lays out the road map for the peace process in the country.

In conclusion, my country calls on the parties to the conflict in Syria to exercise restraint to prevent any deterioration of the humanitarian and security situation, and urges them to strictly respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law. It therefore calls on them to fulfil their obligations to protect civilians in conflict situations and to refrain from any action that could impede the delivery of humanitarian aid to distressed populations.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Special Envoy De Mistura and Director John Ging for the briefings. We commend their efforts to facilitate the political process and alleviate the humanitarian situation in Syria.

China has been closely following the political process and humanitarian situation in Syria. We note that some areas in Syria are rebuilding hospitals and schools and repairing transportation, power and other

infrastructure. Refugees and internally displaced persons are gradually returning to their homes. The international community should further scale up its humanitarian assistance by providing much-needed help to all the areas in need within Syria.

That said, the situation in Syria remains challenging. The political process is faltering, coupled with rampant terrorist activities and high tensions in some parts of Syria, especially Idlib. Given the current situation, we call on all the relevant parties to step up their diplomatic efforts, address issues through dialogue, and facilitate de-escalation through dialogue. The international community should pool its efforts and continue to resolutely combat terrorism and consolidate the gains achieved to date.

Meanwhile, we call on all parties to do everything possible to avoid harming innocent civilians. All parties are duty-bound to adhere to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and other recognized basic norms governing international relations, fully respect Syrian sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity, and avoid the wilful use of force or threat of force.

China has always stood for a political settlement to the issue of Syria, which represents the only path to peace and stability in Syria. The international community should provide steady support to the United Nations as the main mediator and to Special Envoy De Mistura in his efforts to facilitate the resumption of the Geneva peace talks. The international community should act on the principle of a Syrian-owned, Syrian-led process and on resolution 2254 (2015) in pushing all parties in Syria to engage in inclusive political dialogue in search of a solution that responds to the realities on the ground, while accommodating the concerns of all parties. Special Envoy De Mistura will hold discussions with the relevant parties on the establishment of a Syrian constitutional committee. All parties should exert their influence and push the Syrian Government and opposition groups to move towards each other with a view to achieving early results and adding new momentum to the Syrian political process.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank the Special Envoy. I also thank John Ging very much, as well as the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kuwait for being here with us today.

This is a terrible situation. I think that what we are hearing today is very strong support for the primacy of the political process, as well as a very strong appeal for there not to be an all-out military offensive against civilians in Idlib. I would just like to echo those two things right out front before I go into the bulk of my remarks. I think the French representative put it very well when he talked about the importance of this issue for international peace and security.

I want to begin by again thanking the Special Envoy and his team for everything they do, and obviously the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. We are very grateful to those humanitarian organizations and workers who are making tireless efforts in the most difficult circumstances to provide aid to people across Idlib. Once again, we are reminded of the importance of cross-border assistance as a critical lifeline for civilians who otherwise cannot be reached.

We very much support the urgent diplomatic efforts being made by Turkey and the United Nations to deal with Idlib, both on the civilian side and on the humanitarian side. The fate of nearly 3 million people is at stake, and we would very much appreciate a briefing on Astana. I suspect that is not possible today, but if it were possible we would appreciate a briefing from the Department of Political Affairs. We hope that Russia and Iran will use their influence to live up to their commitments to uphold the de-escalation arrangements that they have agreed, and we urge them to do so and to reach a negotiated way forward with Turkey. If there is anything that my Government can do to assist in that process, we will happily do it.

On the military situation, like other speakers we are very concerned at the reports in the past few days of dozens of Russian air strikes against areas of Idlib. Local monitoring organizations have reported 38 civilian casualties as a result of the strikes on 4 September alone. I have already said that nearly 3 million civilians are at risk of their lives in Idlib. The United Nations estimates that there are at a maximum 15,000 fighters for the terrorist groups, which is 0.5 per cent of the total population. We too in Britain know what it is like to suffer from terrorism, but those figures are very stark. I would just like to echo what the Minister said about the doctrine of proportionality, discrimination and precaution.

The Secretary-General has been clear that the systematic use of indiscriminate weapons in populated areas may amount to war crimes. We should be crystal

clear about that. There are more babies in Idlib than there are terrorists, and I think that should give those engaging in military action pause for thought. The last time we discussed the issue of the military side, we were in the consultations room and I read out our understanding of which Syrian military units were in the vicinity of Idlib. In echoing the Secretary-General's call, I would like to read those units out in the Chamber. I would like to make very clear that if there is a major offensive against civilians, with mass civilian casualties in Idlib, then those are the people that the international community will be holding accountable for those abuses and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

Our understanding is that the overall head of the Syrian army is the Minister of Defence, General Ali Abdullah Ayyoub, but the primary unit deployed to the Idlib area is the 4th Armoured Division to the west side of Idlib. Maher Al-Assad is the overall commander of that unit, but we believe that Major General Ali Mahmoud is the Deputy Commander. We understand that the Syrian Republican Guard is probably deployed to the east side, around Abu Al-Duhur, and that its commander is Major General Talal Makhlouf. Tiger Forces are likely deployed to the south-east side, and their commander is Brigadier General Suheil "The Tiger" Al-Hassan. Then we think that there are also Second Corps and Fifth Corps units in the area, and the commander we know about for that is Major General Aous Aslan. As I say, if there is a major offensive against Idlib, then, in addition to the Syrian regime, those commanders and units will be held accountable by the international community.

If I may, I would like to say a word about the aid package for Idlib. The United Kingdom has announced an additional aid package to ensure that the most vulnerable receive the medical treatment, food, water and support they desperately need. The $15 million in new aid includes support to medical centres and mobile clinics and psychological support. We are also backing new technology that provides civilians with early warnings, in the hope of saving lives in communities bombarded by air strikes. Thanks to that, we believe we have been able to warn more than 2 million people and have reduced casualties by up to 27 per cent in areas under heavy bombardment. However, donors should not have to do that. Donors are not a substitute for the Syrian regime, with Russian support, stopping the campaign against their own civilians.

I would like to conclude by reiterating that we support Turkey's efforts to reach a peaceful solution and avert a humanitarian catastrophe. We call on Russia to do more to restrain the Syrian authorities from attacking Idlib and to bring about de-escalation. We also call on all parties to respect international humanitarian law.

I will not touch on the issue of chemical weapons because we addressed it in the Chamber yesterday (see S/PV.8344). I would like to end by echoing the comments made by the representative of Equatorial Guinea with regard to the primary importance of the political process and bringing an end to this cruel war.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I thank you, Madam President, for convening today's meeting on such an urgent and grave subject. We thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura and Mr. John Ging for their informative briefings and continued efforts to help the people of Syria.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands is extremely concerned about the situation in Idlib. We fear a repeat of a horrific scenario we have seen before — the massive use of military force with a ground campaign by the Syrian army, air raids by Russia and support from Iran, at the cost of thousands of innocent lives, with disastrous humanitarian consequences. There is no military solution that will bring about long-term peace in Syria. We need a political transition and a political solution. In that regard, I will focus on three issues: first, the need to prevent a further escalation of violence in Idlib; secondly, the humanitarian situation; and, thirdly, the political process.

First, we must prevent further escalation in Idlib. We must prevent further military escalation in the last de-escalation zone in Syria. Almost 3 million people are trapped in the Idlib area. As clearly stated by the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kuwait just now, the humanitarian consequences of an all-out offensive will be disastrous. Furthermore, the risk of regional escalation is high, including the creation of possible new flows of refugees. Parties must uphold international humanitarian law throughout Syria, and in Idlib in particular. We heard from the countries involved that their aim to fight terrorists. Let me remind them that any measure to counter terrorism must comply with their obligations under international law, in particular human rights law, international refugee law and international humanitarian law. Combating terrorism is no excuse for launching attacks without distinction or

proportionality. Combating terrorism is no excuse for attacking innocent civilians, destroying hospitals and killing humanitarian workers. Combating terrorism is no excuse for creating a humanitarian disaster.

The guarantors of the Idlib de-escalation zone and the Syrian regime must work towards a non-violent negotiated solution. We express our strong support for the urgent diplomatic efforts made by Turkey and the United Nations. In view of the meeting of the Astana guarantors in Tehran today, we call on them, in particular Russia and Iran, to uphold the ceasefire and their agreed de-escalation arrangements. Their earlier commitments include the protection of civilians as a matter of priority. They must protect civilians, not attack them.

Secondly, with 1.4 million internally displaced persons in Idlib, the humanitarian situation is already of great concern. Many people in Idlib depend on humanitarian aid for their daily survival. For the sake of those civilians, once again, we call for the full implementation of all Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2401 (2018), which was made possible by our Kuwaiti and Swedish colleagues.

During the war in Syria, we have seen indiscriminate air strikes and attacks on hospitals and schools. Now we know that the Russian military and the Syrian military have been informed about the exact coordinates of the remaining hospitals in Idlib, any future attack on such essential civilian infrastructure therefore falls under their full responsibility. Humanitarian workers are not a target. Attacks on hospitals and humanitarian aid workers are an affront to human decency. Attacking innocent doctors and nurses is a criminal act. Aid to the people in Idlib must be made available. Parties must grant sustained, unimpeded humanitarian access, including through the essential cross-border mechanism. Without that access, a humanitarian catastrophe is inevitable. The Council should provide a positive response to the five requests Mr. Ging mentioned earlier.

Lastly, we need an inclusive, United Nations-led political process on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015), which includes a political transition that aims to address the root causes of the conflict and lay to rest its source. As I stated before, there will be no reconstruction aid before a sustainable political transition is in place. We fully support Staffan de Mistura and commend him and this team on their persistent efforts.

In conclusion, we will continue our efforts for accountability for mass atrocities and the use of chemical weapons in Syria. At the moment, one member of the Council continues to block the referral of the situation to the International Criminal Court. Therefore, we will continue our efforts for accountability for the mass atrocities committed in Syria and elsewhere, outside of the country. Impunity cannot and will not prevail.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation would like to thank the Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, and the Director of Operations and Advocacy in the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. John Ging, for their briefings. We understand their immense responsibility. Let me reiterate my delegation's full support for their work.

Once again, we underscore our concerns about the possible escalation of violence in Idlib - a city home to, as mentioned earlier, approximately 3 million people, of whom 1.4 million are internally displaced. Many are children who could face internal displacement. That could lead to a humanitarian disaster and increase the number of people who have lost their lives to the conflict over the past eight years. In that regard, we believe that there is an urgent need to fully implement resolution 2401 (2018). We hope that the meeting taking place among the signatories of the Astana agreements will shed light on how the Security Council can meet its aspirations. We call on the parties to continue to monitor the implementation of those agreements. We reiterate that we must prevent the escalation of violence and instead provide humanitarian assistance to the 2.1 million civilians in need in Idlib. Ongoing coordination is essential in order to facilitate better access for humanitarian convoys, including the cross-border convoys.

We believe that any effort or measure to combat terrorism necessarily requires protecting civilian lives, including complying with obligations under international law, including the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant international conventions and protocols. We are keen to hear the suggestions of Mr. De Mistura with regard to protecting civilians.

We stress the need to ensure that populated areas and the entire territory are cleared of explosive remnants of war, including in the city of Raqqa. That is a crucially important and urgent task, not only to

reduce the risks posed to the delivery of humanitarian assistance but also since steps must be taken to avoid fatalities among medical crews, humanitarian workers and ultimately the civilian population as they return to their cities of origin, including in Idlib province. Moreover, we underscore that any returns must be voluntary, unimpeded, dignified and secure.

We reiterate the importance that all parties respect their obligations under international law, especially international humanitarian law. When we say "all parties", we intend what was noted by the representative of Equatorial Guinea: not only those States directly involved but also those States financing the armed groups present in Idlib.

We must ensure the protection of civilians, schools and hospitals. It is imperative that such civilian objects not be used as the targets for attacks, and likewise the workforce of the various humanitarian agencies on the ground must be protected.

We reject any attempts to split up Syria. It is up to the Syrian people to freely determine their future and their political leadership in a context of sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. We must therefore continue supporting the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria.

In conclusion, we stress that there can be no military solution to the conflict in Syria and the only alternative is through an inclusive political process of dialogue negotiated, agreed and led by the Syrian people through the implementation of the final statement of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress, held in Sochi in January, and the establishment of a constitutional committee, a process that should be facilitated by the United Nations in keeping with the Geneva process and in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

Finally, while underscoring this matter is the responsibility of the Security Council and its 15 members, as the Permanent Representative of Peru said, the permanent members bear particular responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. We can only hope that in their decision-making it is not their military interests that prevail but rather the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): We thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura for his briefing. We support and appreciate his indefatigable efforts in the search for a peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis and in response to the urgent and difficult situation in Idlib. We also thank Director John Ging of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for his briefing. We commend the United Nations and its humanitarian partners for continuing to provide much-needed assistance to all in need under extremely challenging circumstances.

We are concerned about the situation in Idlib and the possibility of a humanitarian disaster should the fighting escalate. We recognize that there are United Nations-designated terrorists in Idlib, who must be defeated through coordinated international efforts. What worries us is that military escalation would aggravate the humanitarian crisis in a province where there are approximately 1.4 million people who have already been displaced, and exacerbate the suffering of vulnerable groups. We therefore believe that everything possible should be done to protect the lives of millions of civilians. In that regard, we appreciate ongoing consultations, particularly among the Astana guarantors, as Idlib is a de-escalation zone. We sincerely hope that the key summit of the Astana guarantors that is taking place today will lead to a productive and meaningful outcome in finding a more sustainable solution to the complex situation in Idlib.

We also call on all States that have influence over Syrian actors to play a constructive role in the efforts to avoid a humanitarian disaster in Idlib. We are convinced that it is in such difficult situations that all those with influence should work together in a genuine spirit of cooperation, which would demonstrate the primacy and power of diplomacy.

While we advocate a sustainable solution to the Idlib situation, the humanitarian work of the United Nations and its humanitarian partners should also be fully supported so as to continue reaching all those in need of humanitarian assistance. That will require the protection of civilians and humanitarian workers. In that regard, the offer of the Special Envoy to intervene to help ensure the safety of civilians should be considered with the ultimate objective of doing everything possible to protect civilians in the province.

We further reiterate that all parties should ensure safe, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access. In addition, as we have heard from Director Ging, the United Nations and its humanitarian partners need additional funding to respond to the growing humanitarian needs and to implement the preparedness

plan that he mentioned. Hence, we encourage all donors to extend their generous assistance.

Finally, the people of Syria have experienced unspeakable tragedy over the past seven years. What they need and deserve is a comprehensive and sustainable political solution that meets their legitimate aspirations. While we fully recognize that avoiding further military escalation for the sake of civilians is our current priority, the crisis in Idlib and across all of Syria can be resolved only through political dialogue. There is no military solution. Therefore, at this highly decisive and critical time, the Security Council should support the tireless efforts of the Special Envoy both to avoid the worst-case scenario in Idlib and to establish a constitutional committee that could lead to the reinvigoration of the political process, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

In that regard, we note with appreciation that the Special Envoy has scheduled consultations for next week with relevant States that may have influence on the process. Ultimately, it is through such consultations and, more important, a comprehensive, Syrian-led and -owned dialogue facilitated by the United Nations, that lasting solutions to the crisis in Idlib and the whole of Syria may be found.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We join others in thanking Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and the Director of Operations and Advocacy in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. John Ging, for their comprehensive and very informative briefings on the matter before us. Current developments around Idlib province could easily lead to a deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the region, together with further human casualties among civilians.

Recalling that the Russian military forces were invited by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to counter terrorism in the country, we believe that will enable the definitive liberation of the entire territory of the country, with favourable conditions created for a political settlement on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015).

We encourage the guarantor States of the Astana process and other stakeholders to continue consultations on the search for peaceful ways to liberate Idlib province from terrorist elements. Separating the terrorist groups from moderate opposition forces that are ready for peaceful negotiations with Government forces could be a way forward, as Staffan de Mistura suggests.

We urge the parties to the conflict not to allow a humanitarian catastrophe to occur. To let the situation unravel would be to negate all the good efforts to resolve the Syrian crisis in the framework of the Geneva talks and the Astana process.

Kazakhstan supports the intention of Mr. De Mistura to hold meetings on 10 and 11 September within the framework of the Astana process, especially as the situation around Idlib is escalating. We appreciate the constructive role of the United Nations Special Envoy in the process of seeking a political settlement in Syria.

We hope that the Tehran summit of the Presidents of the guarantor States of the Astana process — Russia, Turkey and Iran — will promote a mutually acceptable decision to restore confidence between the parties in conflict, facilitate progress on the humanitarian situation and invigorate the process towards a political solution.

We also support the efforts of the guarantor States of the Astana process to assist Syrians in restoring unity in the country and achieve a political settlement of the ongoing conflict through inclusive dialogue. That can be achieved by supporting a constitution backed by the Syrian people under appropriate United Nations supervision. Kazakhstan calls for stepping up joint efforts aimed at implementing the confidence-building measures arrived at within the framework of the Astana process, including the release of detainees and abductees, the handing over of bodies, the identification of missing persons and other arrangements.

We believe that the international community should direct its joint efforts at creating the conditions for settling the intra-Syrian conflict by exclusively peaceful means in order to rebuild this ruined country and address the complex humanitarian situation. We must also consider creating appropriate conditions for the return of Syria's numerous refugees. Kazakhstan believes that the active restoration of Syria must continue, regardless of jurisdictions. Kazakhstan is ready to do its utmost to address all issues related to regional and global security.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): The Deputy Foreign Minister of Kuwait also spoke on behalf of Sweden this morning, so I can be very brief and reiterate some of the key points that he and others made.

I think that the way in which Idlib is different from Aleppo, eastern Ghouta and Dara'a has been

clearly stated. The people there have nowhere left to flee to. The size of the population, 3 million, has been mentioned, and it includes many children and internally displaced persons. The catastrophic consequences of a full-scale military escalation have been highlighted, not least by this morning's briefers, Mr. John Ging and Mr. Staffan de Mistura. Many have expressed their grave concern about the escalating military action by Syria and Russia, which have been reminded, along with other parties, of their obligation to protect civilians in accordance with international humanitarian law. Theirs is the primary responsibility for preventing further humanitarian disaster.

It has also been stressed around the table how important it is that the Astana guarantors, who are meeting at the highest level today, immediately implement their own de-escalation agreement in Idlib and prioritize the protection of civilians. I echo the many speakers who have emphasized how urgent it is that the guarantors act now in order to avoid the enormous humanitarian catastrophe that would unfold before our eyes if there were to be a large-scale military offensive in Idlib.

So while it is clear where the responsibilities lie, it is also incumbent on the Council to continue to explore all meaningful preventive options. We have therefore advocated for this meeting in order to enable the Council to prevent this scenario, to express our support to Mr. De Mistura and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and to push for a political solution. We hope that the clear public calls that have been made around the table today and by the 10 elected members earlier this week and the European Union members yesterday (*see S/PV.8344*) will have the desired effect.

But we are also prepared to sit down in close consultation with Mr. De Mistura today, over the weekend or whenever, if need be, in order to explore any concrete meaningful suggestions and proposals to ensure that the Council also collectively shoulders its responsibility and explores and fully exhausts all possible preventive actions.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. De Mistura and Mr. Ging for their briefings. The United States presidency has formulated the topic of today's meeting in a curious way. It has been convened at the initiative of some Council members of the Security Council to consider the situation in the Middle East, with an emphasis on the situation in Idlib. It would appear that Idlib is some kind of separate State entity. We would like to remind the Council that it is an integral part of the Syrian Arab Republic, whose sovereignty and territorial integrity we hope no one questions.

In that connection, Mr. De Mistura's statement to the effect that the Syrian authorities have every right to fight for the restoration of control throughout their territory is very apposite. Furthermore, it is an obligation of the Syrian Government towards its people. We should remember that in eastern Aleppo, Ghouta, the southern suburbs of Damascus, Qalamoun, Dara'a, Quneitra and other difficult areas, it was not peaceful civilians who were evacuated, but rather full-on fighters who had refused to lay down their weapons and return to a normal life as law-abiding citizens.

Nobody disputes the fact that in the Idlib de-escalation zone there is a large number of Jabhat Al-Nusra terrorists who pose a threat to international peace and security. It is that large, militarily capable terrorist group's operations that is determining the current situation in that part of Syria, and its members are striving to keep the area under their control, and the fact that the situation is at a standstill is unacceptable. The de-escalation agreements stipulate that they are temporary, and the relevant Security Council resolutions clearly state that none of the cessation-of-hostilities regimes apply to terrorist organizations. The fight against them must go on, and in that regard we have consistently called on the international community to act decisively, according to the same rules and on a basis of cooperation. It is self-evident that it is not acceptable to preserve terrorist potential for political aims, whatever they may be. It is not acceptable to make all kinds of efforts to create obstacles to the return of Syrian refugees to a country that has largely been rid of terrorists. It is not acceptable to make every effort to obstruct the process of rebuilding Syria and subject it to political conditions. That only attests to the fact that, in reality, our Western partners have absolutely no interest in the fate and plight of ordinary civilians.

The terrorists in Idlib are taking aggressive action. They have taken millions of civilians hostage and are conducting raids on surrounding areas and shelling nearby towns and villages. The cessation-of-hostilities regime is being violated dozens of times every day. Russian troops have destroyed 55 unmanned aerial vehicles armed with explosives flown out of the

de-escalation zone. On 4 September, Russian aircraft carried out strikes on confirmed Al-Nusra targets, far from residential areas, in Idlib province. They were caches where drones and their munitions were stored and kept. A storage site for man-portable air defence systems was also destroyed with high-precision weapons. Where did the terrorists get hold of such large quantities of foreign military equipment? Was it directly from the manufacturers? Or was it from the so-called moderate opposition, which has had no problems getting external support? That is an issue that the relevant United Nations bodies should investigate without delay.

Al-Nusra is focusing its efforts on consolidating radically minded illegal armed groups around it. The terrorist leaders are have been making fierce efforts to block the desire of commanders in the field and leaders of local governing bodies to get out of these groups, going as far as eliminating them physically. A typical example of that approach has been the destruction of groups from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant that refused to join Jabhat Al-Nusra and whose remnants, as many as 500 people, had lost control over regions they had previously held and gone underground.

Here are a few statistics. In the Idlib de-escalation zone there are altogether 40 to 45 armed groups whose members total about 50,000. The greatest resistance comes from Jabhat Al-Nusra, with 16,000 members, and other unreconciled groups, totalling 11,300, whose core consists of foreign fighters and Syrians who have the blood of supporters of Damascus on their hands. They include Hizb Al-Islami Al-Turkistani, with some 700 members; Jaysh Al-Izza, with as many as 1,000 members; the radical ranks of Ahrar Al-Sham, with as many as 800 members; Faylak Al-Rahman, with about 5,500 members; Haras Al-Din, about 1,500 members; Nusrat Al-Islam, about 1,900 members; and Jabhat Al-Wataniya lil-Tahrir, with as many as 800 members. A few armed groups — Jabhat Al-Wataniya lil-Tahrir and the radical ranks of Ahrar Al-Sham — are completely dependent on Al-Nusra. Furthermore, many adherents of those groups are unreconciled because they are forced to be, remaining loyal to the extremists out of fear for their lives and the safety of their families.

However, there are still some groups, whose numbers total around 13,300, that are operating in the zone and are willing to reconcile. They include about 2,300 from the Free Syrian Army, 4,000 from Nusrat Al-Islam, 5,000 from Ahrar Al-Sham, 2,000 from Nour Al-Din Al-Zenki, and others. Besides that, most villages are held by local self-defence units of between 30 and 50 people, about 10,000 altogether, who are also disposed to make peace. As many as 80 per cent of the inhabitants of Idlib are sick of the extremists' tyranny and support reverting to the embrace of the State as soon as possible, a mood shared by some fighters who realize the futility of armed resistance. That has been encouraged by the success of reconciliation in other de-escalation zones, security guarantees provided by Russia and work that is being done to ensure refugees' return. I want to point out that schools and medical facilities financed by the Government are still functioning in Idlib and funds from the budget are being earmarked for supporting vital infrastructure and paying civil servants' salaries.

The Russian Federation is making major efforts to resolve the Idlib situation through negotiations. To that end, intense consultations are being held with the Astana process partners and with those on the ground who are actually controlling the situation. A top-level meeting of the guarantor countries is being held in Tehran today.

One effective solution would be to separate the armed opposition groups that want to participate in the political process from the terrorists, who remain a legitimate target for elimination. Many speakers today have called on the Astana process guarantors. We have also frequently turned to our Western partners, but they have not heeded our calls. Unfortunately, the Western capitals led by Washington that are trying to prevent the fall of their extremism-inclined clients' regime have not used their influence or helped to encourage a separation. Instead, they are hatching another round of aggressive plans around high-profile chemical provocations. We are under the distinct impression that in fomenting hysteria over Idlib, our Western partners are trying to prevent the fall of the last major terrorist stronghold in Syria in any way they can, and this is far more about geopolitics than about the humanitarian concern for the protection of civilians that they claim.

The possibility of joining in the initiatives for reconciliation and thereby strengthening the positive trends in Syria is still there. Staffan de Mistura, who is in active contact with the Syrian opposition within the framework of his political mandate, could also send it the same message. We affirm our full commitment to a Syrian-led political process on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015). I will not list everything we have

undertaken to advance the political process. We call on other partners to make a real contribution to it.

The propaganda campaign currently being fomented by Damascus's opponents around Idlib follows the scripts for the scenarios that were predicted when Aleppo and eastern Ghouta were being liberated, but neither of those apocalyptic prognoses materialized, unlike in Raqqa, which has been bombed into the ground by the so-called coalition. The subject of the military occupation by Western countries of areas of Syria, including its humanitarian aspects, clearly warrants special discussion in the Security Council.

The President: I will now make a statement in my national capacity as the representative of the United States of America.

I would first like to thank Mr. Ging and Mr. De Mistura for giving us the latest information about the dire situation in Idlib. I also want to welcome the statement of grave concern about Idlib that the Security Council's 10 elected members delivered yesterday.

The Al-Assad regime and its enablers, Russia and Iran, have a playbook for this war. First, they surround a civilian area. Next, they make the preposterous claim that everyone in the area is a terrorist, so that every man, woman and child becomes a target. Then comes the so-called starve-and-surrender campaign, where they keep attacking until the people no longer have food, clean water or shelter. It is a playbook of death. The regime has spent the last seven years refining it with Russia and Iran's help. It has happened so many times before. In July, it was Dara'a and south-western Syria where the regime trapped and besieged civilians. In February, it was eastern Ghouta. The year before, it was eastern Aleppo, and before that, places like Madaya and Hamah. In the process, the regime has left behind a country of rubble. The atrocities committed by Al-Assad will be a permanent stain on history and a black mark for the Council, which Russia has blocked over and over again from taking action to help.

Now an offensive against Idlib is starting. Despite the clear warnings of the President of the United States and other world leaders, air strikes by Russia and the regime have already begun against civilian areas. The United States has been very clear with Russia and the broader international community. We consider any assault on Idlib to be a dangerous escalation of the conflict in Syria. If Al-Assad, Russia and Iran continue, the consequences will be dire. We heard earlier that 3 million people are at risk in Idlib, 99 per cent of them innocent civilians. To put that in perspective, that is 7.5 times the number of the people whom the Al-Assad regime besieged in eastern Ghouta. It is nearly 11 times the number of people whom the Al-Assad regime trapped in eastern Aleppo. At the time, we said that the level of civilian suffering was unbearable. If the Council can even imagine it, Idlib would be even worse. The Al-Assad regime must halt its offensive. Russia and Iran, as countries with influence over the regime, must stop the catastrophe. It is in their power to do so. Our Russian colleagues claim that they are seeking a political solution to the Syrian conflict, but they do nothing to help us get there. If they support an offensive in Idlib, the world will know where Russia really stands when it comes to supporting peace talks.

The United States is deeply concerned about the presence of terrorists in Idlib. There are many ways to target those groups effectively without causing a humanitarian catastrophe. But when Russia and the Al-Assad regime say they want to counter terrorism, they actually mean that they want to bomb schools, hospitals and homes. They want to punish the civilians who had the courage to rise up against Al-Assad. When the regime calls the brave White Helmets terrorists, we know that they are not serious about fighting terrorism. The United States will not cooperate with Russia in the Al-Assad regime's slaughter of innocent civilians.

Russia also wants the United States and the international community to provide money to rebuild Syria. To translate that, they want us to clean up all the roads, bridges and homes that Russian jets, Iranian-backed militias and Syrian shells have destroyed. The United States will not consider such requests for reconstruction aid until we see concrete results from a genuine political process that ends the war and offers freedom to the Syrian people. No one else should either. That would be absurd. The United States taxpayer is certainly not going to subsidize Al-Assad's campaign of destruction.

There is time still to pursue an alternative. The United States wants to see such a political solution emerge in Syria, one that is based on the road map set out in resolution 2254 (2015). That calls for a real dialogue among Syrians and the drafting of a new constitution, leading to genuine free and fair elections.

But for Russia, continuing to support that murderous dictator and isolating itself from the international

community is the wrong choice. An offensive in Idlib will only leave Syria weaker and more broken and create generations of Syrians who will never forget the heinous and senseless brutality of the Al-Assad regime and its allies.

We urge Russia to consider its options carefully, stop Al-Assad's assault on Idlib and work with us — with the United Nations and international partners — to find peace at last for Syria. The Secretary-General and the overwhelming majority of the members of the Council have made their position very clear: Russia needs to live up to its responsibility and put an end to the fighting. There are no other options for the people of Syria. They have suffered enough.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I again give the floor to Mr. De Mistura for any additional comments that he may wish to make.

Mr. De Mistura: I thank you, Madam President, for again giving me the floor. For this meeting is potentially crucial, as we continue to hope that the meeting in Tehran will be as well — from what we hear, there have been important discussions. Time is of the essence.

Let me start with a picture. I do not know whether Council members can see it properly, but depicted here is an image of women holding candles. They are civilians, as are 98.8 per cent of the people in Idlib. They are our top priority.

I received a letter from 1,000 women in Idlib — women and mothers, not terrorists — who have been urging all of us to remember that they are civilians, internally displaced people, teachers, doctors, nurses, engineers, writers and homemakers, and that they come from many parts of Syria. Idlib therefore symbolizes the mosaic that is Syria. It is true that many of the fighters who were evacuated — or decided to reconcile, evacuate or whatever the terminology was — also went there, but they are a very small group in comparison with those I am referring to. In their letter, the women stated:

> "We invite you, Mr. De Mistura, to Idlib to see for yourself and tell everyone in the world that we are civilians of Idlib whose voices have been silenced and are not being heard. Civilians have been suffering over the past years, and we are hoping that they will not have to suffer any longer. We want a country without war, and we want a future in which we can live."

They too are against terrorism, but they cannot show that because the situation is very difficult. However, they are not expecting to be bombed while terrorists are being identified or addressed.

Let me go into some more substantive aspects.

The reason that all of us were very eager to meet today is because there was an important meeting in Tehran among the Heads of State of Iran, Turkey and Russia. As we are aware, they have been intensely discussing future formulas for Idlib. We do not know the details of what was discussed or what the outcome is. What I got from their meeting is that time is needed and time is of the essence. I hope that more time will be given for discussions among them and among all of us in order to avoid what we all call, and President Erdoğan repeated again today, a potential catastrophe.

There were reports that President Erdoğan put some ideas on the table, and I understand that they were quite substantive. We have not seen them yet, and we are looking forward to hearing more when we meet our Turkish partners and colleagues early next week — and perhaps the Council will be hearing more about them. The signals indicate that they intend to continue talking about how to implement some ideas. On that basis, let me also propose my own idea. Actually, it is an idea I heard from civil society. I know some people say "civil society" when they may be referring to terrorists, but the people I am referring to are very normal people who have been expressing fear about being where they are and about what could happen.

The key dilemma that we are hearing all the time — and it is indeed a dilemma; I feel it too — has to do with how one squares a terrible circle having to do with the fact of the presence of a number of United Nations-listed terrorists. We know that they are terrorists, as they have been clearly identified, but they are a small number in comparison with the 2.9 million people. Then there are almost 3 million people who are just in between and would not like to end up in between.

They key word that I have been hearing, which was also mentioned in Tehran and which we have been hearing for at least three years, is "separation". How do you separate listed terrorist groups and other armed groups that are not terrorists and can be "reconciled" — or at least one can take a different approach in addressing

them — and the general population? I think there is even a reference in paragraph 4 of the joint statement made in Tehran on that. Let us therefore address that aspect. That is where we need more creativity.

I believe one Government official publicly asked why the United Nations did not come up with some ideas on how to separate them. I agree that it is not easy. However, here is a potential plan: turning the table. We have been saying that there are no more Idlibs — I have been saying it and Council members have been saying it, and rightly. However, are Council members sure that within Idlib there are no more Idlibs? Let me explain: perhaps the population should not be moving away. The people that should be moving out of the population centres and the villages are the fighters — the Al-Nusra Front.

That type of idea is potentially doable and is based on some assumptions. The first assumption is that the large majority, that is, 98.5 or 98.8 per cent. of the population in Idlib are civilians, and they have a voice. They are telling us that. They want to use that voice. And they can use that voice in order to produce the separation we are talking about. The second assumption is that Turkey is generally very worried about a potential catastrophe. We heard that from President Erdoğan. Turkey has influence — we know it, Turkey knows it — on armed groups present in the area, and it can exert that influence.

Russia, Iran and the Government of Syria state that their priority is to defeat terrorists in Idlib, or at least to separate them. How can we not agree on that? If that is the case, the main objective of a plan would be to first spare the lives of civilians and to avoid a mass exodus, because that would be a problem. We can handle 700,000 or 800,000, but there are 3 million of them. In which direction will they go? Towards Turkey or towards the Government area, where they are afraid to go? It is therefore important to avoid that effect.

Secondly, we may be able to see whether we can assist separating the population de facto from the extremists and terrorists, and the terrorists from other groups. What could such a plan consist of? Ideally, all militant fighters should be provided with a deadline to move their own military presence and bases away — I repeat, away — from population centres and villages. Population centres would therefore remain under the control of the civilian local councils and local police. That would apply in particular to members of Al-Nusra, who should be notified by the guarantors — especially including Turkey, which has the capacity to send strong messages to them — to evacuate houses and villages. At the same time — and this is the message that I received from the population — a media campaign would be needed to indicate that this is what has been asked of those armed groups, namely, to move out. "Do not remain in my house. Do not remain in my city." Three million people can be mobilized in that context.

Do we have examples of that? Such social mobilization has already been increasing. We have seen not only candle lights, but demonstrations without Al-Nusra's banner. There was an attempt today by Al-Nusra to actually fly its own flag. The people said, "No, we do not want that; we want just to remind everyone that we are civilians". Three million people have a voice, which they can use if they know that we are serious. That would require, of course that, at the same time the Russian Federation ensure this type of plan, together with Turkey, which would be a major player in such an endeavour, and that the population be made aware and mobilized to actually express their voice to tell the fighters that there would be no aerial attacks or major military attacks on any population centre. Otherwise, all this would be futile.

This is not the only plan and could be one of many; for all I know, it could be the plan that President Erdoğan has proposed to President Putin. I really do not know. This plan is based on the common sense of the people whom the United Nations is supposed to represent sometimes — is that not true? — especially in the kind of situation in which they now find themselves. Russia and Turkey, above all, should be the guarantors, together with Iran, of such a plan. Perhaps, the Security Council could then support it.

In conclusion, I believe that we — including me — are constantly raising concerns, stating how tragic and terrible the situation could become and warning about it, while we need to have some concrete plans. I heard of one such plan from the people of Idlib.

The President: I thank Mr. De Mistura for sharing that additional information from the citizens of Syria.

I now give the floor to the representative of Syria.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to provide the Security Council with some information concerning the Astana process. The Astana process — during which, as Council

members know, I participated in its deliberations leading to the Astana 4 agreement — is intended to reach an understanding aimed at establishing de-escalation zones within Syria. That understanding was temporary for six months, renewable in the event that the armed groups that participated in reaching the Astana 4 agreement respected the ceasefire and disassociated themselves from terrorist groups. That has not happened in Idlib.

Those armed groups refused to dissociate themselves from terrorist groups. Rather, to be precise, the armed groups did not refuse to dissociate themselves; it was the same sponsors of those armed groups and terrorist groups that refused to do so while the armed groups had agreed to the Astana 4 agreement. Thus, the disassociation did not happen in Idlib. In addition, the terrorists in Idlib launched 400 drones targeting the Russian Hmeimim base in Latakia. They have also bombarded Aleppo city almost daily for more than a year-and-a-half since we adopted the Astana 4 agreement. Therefore, whoever says that Idlib is a de-escalation zone is wrong, being unaware of the situation on the ground. There is no de-escalation zone in Idlib because armed groups have not respected the provisions of the Astana agreement.

This is just an introduction for members of the Council to explain what we mean by the Astana process, its understanding and how we have reached the current situation in Idlib. Of course, the story dates back earlier. As the Council knows, it started at the Vienna conference in November 2015, in which Syria did not participate and to which it was not even invited. At that conference, it was decided that Jordan would prepare lists determining who is and is not a terrorist. Saudi Arabia was asked to decide who represented and did not represent the opposition. So far that has not happened, which explains the current situation. The countries sponsoring terrorism do not want to distinguish between terrorists and armed opposition.

The Astana process tried to find a solution through the establishment of de-escalation zones. Unfortunately, the process has failed in Idlib for the same reason because the sponsors of the armed and terrorist groups failed to respect the decisions made in Vienna Conference in 2014 and the Astana 4 agreement. My British colleague said earlier that there are 50,000 terrorists in Idlib. Mr. De Mistura said that there are very few gunmen in Idlib, but I would say to my dear colleague the British Ambassador that we are talking about 50,000 terrorists. Could she imagine some day seeing 50,000 terrorists in Manchester, wreaking havoc, while we call them the moderate British armed opposition? Is it imaginable that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs would provide them with humanitarian aid so as to sustain them in Manchester? That would be absurd.

It is truly ironic that many States Members of the Organization are now facing an unprecedented challenge, namely, that the presidency of the Council is simultaneously playing the role of adversary and arbiter. Yesterday, Madam President, you forced the discussion on Nicaragua onto the Security Council's agenda, although the situation in that country does not constitute a threat to international peace and security. Today, you are forcing a discussion on Idlib, which is a dear part of my country. It will be Venezuela's turn tomorrow, followed by that of Iran, according to our understanding of the current month's programme of work.

The bitter hostility directed towards us for decades has never been our choice because we are one of the founding Members of the United Nations. We believe in peace and in sparing humankind the scourge of war. It has become common practice for three Western countries that are permanent members of the Security Council to use their presidency of the Council to rally others against my country and Government. They hold hundreds of meetings, ring alarm bells, level accusations against us and use menacing language whenever the Syrian army and its allies make progress in countering the armed terrorist groups that are the tools used by those countries.

For the thousandth time, we underscore in this Chamber that the Governments of those three Western countries and their tools in the region are the main and direct cause of the suffering of our people inside and outside the country. They fuel the conflict in Syria and do their utmost to perpetuate by investing in the takfiri, Wahhabi and Saudi terrorism that they invented in the 1980s. Their intelligence services devised deceptive names for the terrorists, such as the Caliphate State, the Army of Islam, the Soldiers of Islam, the Al-Nusra Front, the Turkistan Islamic Army and the Nur Al-Din Al-Zenki Movement. All those names have absolutely nothing to do with Syria. They use such groups as a tool of their foreign policy to exact revenge from countries that reject their diktats.

Any action taken by the Syrian Government to expel terrorist organizations from the Syrian province of Idlib — Idlib is not in Somalia — is a legitimate, sovereign right under international law, the Charter of the United Nations, Security Council resolutions on counter-terrorism and the Astana agreements. Such action is ttaken in response to the demands of millions of Syrians, including the people living in Idlib who are besieged by terrorist organizations. Every day, the Government receives thousands of appeals from our people in Idlib, asking us to liberate them from terrorism.

No country or entity has the right to curtail our sovereign right or use the suffering of civilians in Idlib as a pretext for political or media bartering in order to dissuade the Syrian Government from restoring security, stability and normalcy to that Syrian province. Defending terrorist groups operating in Idlib and surrounding areas is a desperate attempt to save such groups and prolong their existence in preparation for recycling them and then sending them as heavily armed "moderate" oppositions to other countries, such as Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan and Nigeria.

The Syrian State is deeply committed to ensuring the safety of its people. That is why we have clearly stated that reconciliation is our priority. We gave armed groups in Idlib plenty of time to lay down their arms, become part of the reconciliation process and disassociate themselves from terrorist organizations not covered in the Astana 4 agreement. In that regard, those who facilitated the entry of foreign terrorist fighters into my country — the United Nations and the Secretariat refer to them as non-State actors, as opposed to terrorists; the French Ambassador uses the term "jihadists", not "terrorists" — in particular the Turkish Government, still have a chance to remove them from Idlib province, just as they did with elements of the White Helmets who were sent to Idlib, with the cooperation of Israel and Jordan, in order to commit further terrorist crimes with chemical weapons.

If armed terrorist groups refuse to lay down their weapons and leave Syria, the Syrian Government is prepared to shoulder its humanitarian responsibilities and take all the necessary measures to protect civilians; ensure them safe corridors for leaving Idlib; and provide them with shelter, food and medical care, just as in other, similar situations. The aim is to liberate the province of Idlib from the Al-Nusra Front, which is a designated terrorist organization, alongwith other affiliated terrorist groups not covered by the Astana agreements. The Syrian Government has also called upon all international organizations operating in Syria to prepare to meet urgent humanitarian needs.

Speaking of the Al-Nusra Front, I note that the United States, Britain, France and Ukraine continued for one full year in this Council to refuse our call to add Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham — which means the Al-Nusra Front, which means Al-Qaida, which means the criminals who attacked New York — to the Council's terrorist list. However, a month ago we suddenly heard that Washington, D.C., had approved the designation of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham as a terrorist group affiliated with the Al-Nusra Front, which means Al-Qaida.

The Syrian Arab Republic is committed to countering and uproot terrorisming and to liberate all Syrian territories from terrorism and foreign occupation in all its forms and manifestations. Support for Syria today is the litmus test of good intentions, compliance with international law and the Charter and of credibility in the war against terrorism. We have provided information to the Council on the intention of terrorist organizations and the White Helmets to use chemical substances in order to blame the Syrian Government and pave the way for yet another tripartite act of aggression. We call on those three countries with influence on terrorist organizations to prevent them from using weapons or chemical substances as a pretext to allow interference and direct aggression by their sponsors against my country.

I would like to inform the Council of the good news that investing in terrorism in Syria has failed. Liberating Idlib from the Al-Nusra Front and other terrorist organizations would be the last nail in their coffin. It would crush the hopes of those who invested billions of dollars in terrorism and whose cries have echoed in the halls of the Organization, just as they did when the Syrian army liberated the eastern districts of Aleppo, eastern Ghouta, Dar'a, Quneitra and their rural areas.

In conclusion, I would like to respond to my colleague, the Deputy Foreign Minister of Kuwait. I remind him that Waleed Al-Tabtabaie, a member of the Kuwaiti National Assembly, organized a campaign to send terrorists to Syria in 2012. The campaign was called "Go fight for jihad in Syria". I am speaking here about a member of the Kuwaiti Parliament, supported of course by terrorist takfiris and salafis who are also

members of Parliament in Kuwait. Another Kuwaiti, Shafi Al-Ajmi, who was added to the list of terrorists at our request, although other members had refused to do so for several years, claims that he is a religious leader. He sent thousands of terrorists and billions of dollars to support terrorism in my country. In 2012, *The New York Times* published a long article on a member of the Kuwaiti army, one Sergeant Al-Mutairi, alleging that he had sent terrorists and $500 million to sponsor terrorism in my country. That is what we received from our brothers in Kuwait. Kuwait calls us brothers but I do not know what kind of brothers these men are. Cain and Abel were not like that. When we stood by Kuwait's side, we did not send terrorists to Kuwait. We sent military forces to protect Kuwait.

The meeting rose at noon.